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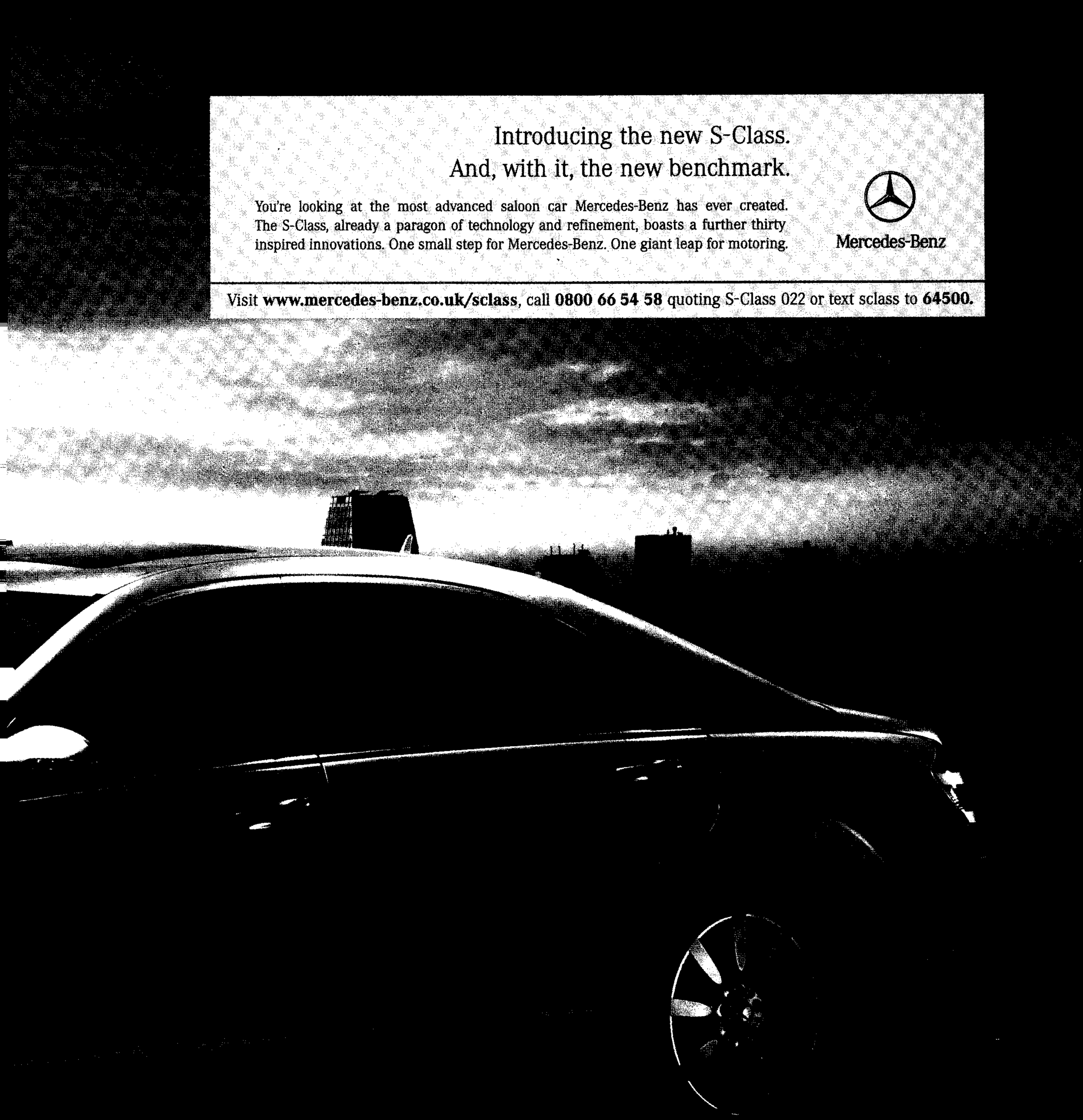

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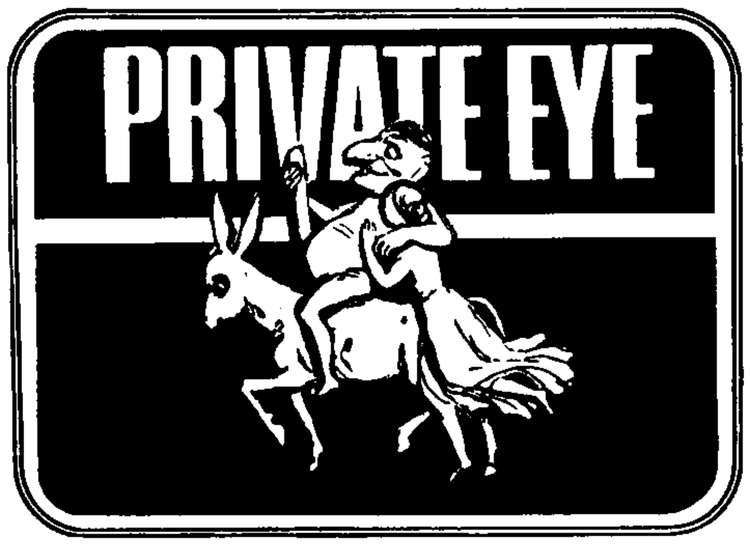

THE government's close links with the investment bank UBS are to be investigated by the National Audit Office, as part of its inquiry into whether the privatisation of QinetiQ represents "good value" to taxpayers.

Three years ago UBS advised ministers on the sale of a 34 percent stake in QinetiQ to John Major and his chums at the Carlyle Group. As the *Sunday Telegraph* reported last weekend: "It has emerged that among those who helped run the placement at UBS was James Sassoon, the bank's head of privatisation. But just as the auction was ending Mr Sassoon moved to the Treasury, where he headed the directorate responsible for the department's relations with industry and public-private partnerships such as QinetiQ."

The NAO may feel that the name James Sassoon rings a bell. As head of Warburg's privatisation team he also advised Whitehall on the worst privatisation ever: the Tories' sale of Railtrack. An earlier NAO inquiry revealed that Warburg not only advised the government on the sale but also earned fees flogging the shares – a clear conflict of interest. A low price for Railtrack shares made for an easier sale, cheating the exchequer, but did nothing to reduce the bank's unusually large commission.

When he appeared before the public accounts committee in 1999, one MP accused Sassoon of "ripping off the taxpayer". Which is precisely the allegation now being made again: for an outlay of £42m the Carlyle Group acquired from the taxpayer a stake in QinetiQ which will be worth £341m on flotation.

Back in 2002, when the *Eye* first raised questions about Sassoon's work for Gordon Brown (*Eye* 1066), the Treasury explained to us that having such a senior banker on hand was "very helpful". We must wait to see if the National Audit Office seconds this opinion.

The complete

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ABC

"I failed my health MOT and got scrapped"

NOW THAT John Prescott has belatedly "remembered" to pay his council tax, perhaps Westminster City Council will turn its attention to the irregular arrangements of another senior Labour figure in the borough – Lord Levy, Tony Blair's favourite tennis partner and special envoy to the Middle East.

For more than four years Levy has been using a mews flat in Marylebone solely as his office, even though it's always been a designated home and no planning permission has been sought or given for change of use. Other residents in the mews tried to stop this almost as soon as he moved in. One lodged a formal complaint with the council, but Levy rebuffed it by insisting that his secretary, Jean, was really a "housekeeper".

Not so. One bedroom is the secretary's office, the other is an office for the man who runs Levy's charities, and the sitting room is used for meetings. The charade was eventually discovered by the police and fire brigade when the flat was gutted by a blaze two months ago. In the secretary's room (the seat of the fire, which had apparently been started by an unextinguished cigarette) they found "no sleeping arrangements" but a large amount of charred and melted office equipment.

Even Levy couldn't maintain the pretence any longer. "The fire broke out last Thursday in the mews building where Lord Levy's offices are located," his spokesman told the *Evening Standard*. "One room, used by his secretary, was devastated." But the *Standard* didn't realise the significance of this admission, unaware that the flat was supposed to be purely residential.

"This is irritating," Levy's spokesman said of the fire, "but Lord Levy is not short of offices." In which case, presumably, he'll have no need to resume his improper use of the place once it's rebuilt. Westminster's planning enforcement wallahs claim to give "especial priority" to cracking down on "the loss of permanent residential units by a change of use, ie office use"; so on 6 January a neighbour wrote to the council "to ask you urgently to enforce planning laws at [the flat], and to return it to its legal use as a home". So far, however, there has been no reply.

IN 2003 the *People* newspaper revealed that Judge Roger Davies, a 63-year-old father of two, "secretly uses gay chat lines for sordid dates with rent boys". "The *People* can reveal he leads a shameful double life arranging sexual liaisons with male prostitutes he meets on the Internet."

When the judge was quietly allowed to take early retirement during the course of a investigation by the Department of Constitutional Affairs into his conduct, retaining his £1m pension, the paper was appalled and cast around for public figures who would share their outrage. One was only too happy to oblige.

As the paper reported on 17 October 2004: "Lib Dem Home Office Spokesman Mark Oaten stormed, 'It's a whitewash. The system is trying to cover up'."

Straight talking

■ **Whaleballs: Fleet St's Moby dicks** 7

■ **Nukes, consultants, ID cards & more** 8

■ **Labour's bullshitting baroness** 9

■ **United Health: Coming to a surgery near you? In the Back** 27-29

■ **Why Cherie's talking Turkey: Slicker** 30

Number Crunching

23% ■ Support for Liberal Democrats in general election which convinced party it could do better without Charles Kennedy

13% ■ Support for Liberal Democrats in opinion polls three weeks after getting rid of Charles Kennedy

IT WAS, the *Times* claimed, a "'black day' in China", when the internet giant Google launched a search engine in the country that "self-censors information deemed 'subversive' by the Communist authorities". The company would, the paper reported, face "an inevitable backlash".

It should know. It was after all the *Times*'s parent company News Corporation which dropped BBC World Service Television from its pan-Asian satellite TV service, Star, a decade ago, ensuring that no "subversive" information about Tibetan independence or the Tiananmen Square massacre could slip out and embarrass Rupert Murdoch's new pals, the Chinese government.

Oddly, the *Times* did not find space to record this fact – though Beijing correspondent Jane MacCartney did note that the Chinese were already used to only being able to find out about the news "through gossip on the streets".

'NOBODY' WINS POPULARITY CONTEST

Eyeballs

"There are no drinking and shagging stories about Mark Oaten, MP for Winchester..."

Private Eye, issue 1150

NEWS

SINCE the last *Eye* reported that Mapeley had decamped to Guernsey to avoid yet more tax on its offshore deal to own and run the Revenue and Customs offices, others are again showing some interest.

Michael Fallon MP, a member of parliament's treasury committee, says he wants his group to look at the hugely lucrative deal again. The real scandal, as explained in the *Eye*, is that taxpayers pay over the odds while Mapeley makes huge profits independent of the properties' appreciation in value, which it assured parliament it wouldn't, all the time dodging yet more tax.

Two years ago the National Audit Office meekly swallowed the government's figures – even judging the tax avoidance aspect immaterial – while the Public Accounts Committee asked a few questions about the numbers, got confused and gave up. Maybe another committee will make a better fist of it.

GOOD to see that departing Trinity Mirror chairman Sir Victor Blank is set to acquire another role befitting his abilities by becoming chairman of high street bank Lloyds TSB.

Lloyds is still reeling from various mis-selling episodes in recent years; just before Christmas it was forced to set aside another £150m to meet endowment compensation claims. The last thing it needs is any more scandal – and who better to keep a watchful eye on the mis-selling bankers than Sir Victor? He did after all prove his expertise in the ways of the financial markets by describing Piers Morgan's purchases of shares just before the City Slickers tipped them in the *Mirror* as a "coincidence", and showed he could bring on financial talent by promoting Moron to editor-in-chief at the *Mirror* and *Sunday Mirror* (see *Eye* 1148) not long after the affair.

POLICE 5

THE Falkland Islands chief of police has been arrested and charged with "doing acts intended to pervert the course of justice" after allegedly putting pressure on a junior officer to drop an assault charge.

Superintendent Dave Morris and Detective Sergeant Jonathan Butler are both charged with having instructed colleagues to remove details from statements and suppress evidence last August. Supt Morris faces a further charge of putting pressure on another officer to "to terminate a police inquiry into an allegation of an assault" last March.

The pair have been suspended since last November while a seven-strong team from the Metropolitan Police professional standards unit went to the islands to investigate – at a cost to the Falkland Islands Government (FIG) of more than £102,000. The Royal Falklands Police has just 17 officers when at full strength and the Falklands are not exactly a hot-bed of crime – the first Saturday in January saw just two callouts, to a man "staggering" in the street and some cows wandering into a minefield.

EYE TOLD YOU SO

GOOD to see the nationals finally catching up with *Private Eye*.

The *Guardian* reported on 18 January that police and senior prosecutors had been warned about the credibility of a computer analyst who has given expert testimony in many sensitive cases.

Eye readers knew this last July when we revealed that "Jim Bates, a forensic computer expert... is himself being investigated by police because of concerns over his professional qualifications and credibility."

On 6 January, in *Eye* 1149, we also noted that the Crown Prosecution Service is concerned about Bates's "independence and impartiality", and that the attorney-general is considering whether to prosecute him for contempt of court, "after it was suggested that he tried to record proceedings at Northampton crown court".

Meanwhile the *Times* had a shock revelation on 16 January: "Michael Heath, a Home Office pathologist for 14 years, is facing a tribunal over his handling of two murder cases." A scoop? Not quite. The *Eye* has been monitoring "disquiet in the forensic world about the activities of Michael Heath" for almost a year!

Street of Shame

FOR readers confused by some of the phrases used in newspaper coverage of recent revelations concerning the Liberal Democrat front bench, the *Eye* is happy to offer the following clarifications:

"*I am perfectly willing to say that I have had both homosexual and heterosexual relationships in the past... I am very happy to make a clear statement about the issue*" means "The Sun has informed me it has 'incontrovertible evidence' of my calls to gay chat lines which it intends to publish whether I give this interview to Trevor Kavanagh or not."

"*I unintentionally gave the wrong impression*" means "When I told the *Independent* last week 'No I am not gay' the *Independent* did not have that incontrovertible evidence."

"*An unspeakable act of degradation*" and "*a bizarre sex act too revolting to describe*" both refer to the sexual practice known as coprophilia.

"*Errors of judgement in my personal behaviour*" means "I paid two male prostitutes to dress up in football strips and *(That's quite enough. Ed.)*

HOW very appropriate that it was *News of the Screws* chief reporter Neville Thurlbeck who exposed Mark Oaten's "sordid secret double life". According to the *NoW*, "the scandal exposes Oaten as a hypocrite... he has no qualms about using family values to further his career".

Well, Neville Thurlbeck is a man who knows all about hypocrisy. He is the hack who made his excuses and stayed.

In 1998 *Eye* 962 reported how Thurlbeck pulled off a classic *NoW* scam by "exposing" a naturist B&B in Dorset as "a kinky brothel... where all rooms come with en-suite pervert". Landlady Sue Firth, he wrote, would serve guests breakfast in bed and then stay for "romps" while husband Bob spied on the rumpy-pumpy from a hiding place in a wardrobe. Alas the story was mostly, er, balls.

Thurlbeck – writing under the pseudonym "Jack Tunstall" because his wife didn't like him working on sex stories – quoted Sue Firth as offering "a full sex session with me and my husband for £75". The truth – captured on a security videotape by the Firths – was that the reporter offered the couple £75 if *he* could watch *them* having sex. This the former "swingers" agreed to do – but were furious when Thurlbeck twisted the tale to claim that they had taken the initiative and that Sue was having sex with guests rather than her husband.

The *Eye* still has in its possession video stills of the *News of the World* man naked on Sue Firth's massage table – a sight, as the *Screws* might put it, too revolting to reproduce in a family magazine.

WELL DONE to Sir Ian Blair for identifying "institutional racism" as the reason "an Asian man dragged to his death" received less press coverage than the stabbing of white lawyer Thomas ap-Rhys Price.

Admittedly, the "paragraph on page 97" which Sir Ian claimed Balbir Matharu received after he was run over by thieves outside the East London builders' merchants where he worked was actually eight articles in the national press over a period of five days (including the *People*'s "Cops Hunt Killers of Brave Dad" and the *Daily Star*'s "Dad Died a Hero"). But that is, nevertheless, fewer than the 15 devoted to Mr ap-Rhys Price.

Interestingly, it is also double the number written about white teenager Christopher Davies, who was stabbed to death outside Upney tube station in East London a week later, and four times as many as were devoted to white IT consultant Richard Topp, killed at Welwyn Garden City station on 8 January.

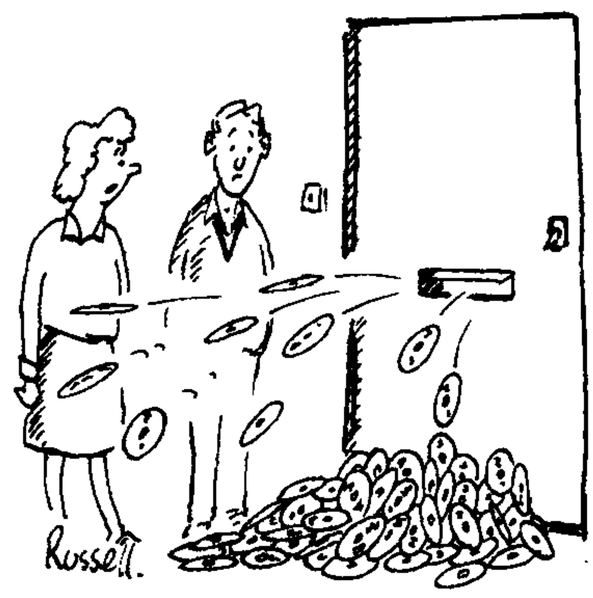
Could the discrepancy have anything to do with the fact that for three consecutive days during the investigation into Mr Ap-Rhys's murder, the Metropolitan Police released CCTV pictures of the moments leading up to his attack, encouraging the media to use them in the hope they would "jog witnesses' memories"?

RICHARD Littlejohn may be getting on a bit, but his legendary gaydar is still in working order.

"To be honest, I've always assumed all Liberal Democrats are homosexuals, unless presented with concrete evidence to the contrary," he revealed in the *Daily Mail* last Friday. Thus he'd always thought that Simon Hughes was gay, "and it's never bothered me".

Littlejohn fans may have a slight sense of *déjà-vu* here. "I've always assumed all policewomen are lesbians anyway, unless provided with incontrovertible proof to the contrary," he informed *Sun* readers on 6 January 2004. On 30 August last year he turned his attention to the armed services: "I have no problem with gays and lesbians who want to join the forces. I've always pretty much assumed most women in uniform were lesbians, anyway."

Anyone else?



"They've introduced 24-hour free DVDs"

AS ONE of the most high-profile women in British business, *Financial Times* boss Dame Marjorie Scardino may be slightly embarrassed by the most immediate consequence of Lionel Barber's recent arrival as editor – a mass purge of females.

In the two months since he was appointed, every senior woman in the editorial department has gone. Dianne Summers, managing editor and *FT* veteran of 20 years, is leaving with no job lined up, as is news editor Debbie Hargreaves. Tracy Corrigan, the other news editor, has been demoted. Deputy editor Chrystia Freeland has been shunted off to a smaller, boxwallah-style job in the American office. All four women have been replaced by men.

Barber, it seems, works best surrounded by men, preferably yes-men. He revealed his true colours in a farewell speech for Chrystia Freeland in the newsroom, saying she would do well in her new role in the US "despite being a working mother". Whatever must Dame Marje think?

THE latest issue of *Vanity Fair* carries a flattering review of Brown's hotel in central London by contributing editor Victoria Mather.

With any luck, management at Brown's will bear this in mind the next time they get round to reappraising the discount rate that has long been enjoyed at the hotel by hacks from, er, *Vanity Fair* and other Condé Nast mags.

MICHAEL BARRYMORE AND THE REVERSE FERRET

MICHAEL BARRYMORE's success in *Celebrity Big Brother* – he came second with 44 percent of the public vote – produced a spectacular example of that great tabloid manoeuvre, the reverse ferret.

The *Daily Star*, which three weeks ago branded his appearance in the show a "Scum Back", appeared delighted. "Michael Barrymore will be 'awight' again after his amazing *Big Brother* comeback," the paper enthused. "There was not a single jeer as the 53-year-old milked the cheers for all they were worth. He's now lined up more telly work and claimed his time in the house was like therapy."

"Barry More!" shrieked the front page of the *Daily Mirror*, over the news that he was "heading for a spectacular TV return... there's talk of an eight-week series." Barrymore presumably need not fear the *Mirror* denouncing any new project as a "sick C4 stunt", as it did his *Big Brother* participation. "Paying Barrymore £150,000 to use a popular show to resurrect his career is a mistake and deserves to backfire on the executives who came up with the ghoulish proposition," the paper opined on 2 January.

The *News of the World* concurred. "By wheeling on Barrymore for *Big Brother* laughs, C4 shames itself," an editorial declared on 1 January. "Do we really want to see this shamed entertainer flaunting himself?" Er... yes, according to the paper's readers, 55 percent of whom voted in an online poll that the presenter "should be allowed to make a UK comeback", and the paper duly awarded a double-page spread to "Barrymore's Own Story", a tearful interview with both him and his boyfriend, last Sunday.

Most spectacular, however, was the *Sun*, which united its new best friend with Terry Lubbock, the father of the man found dead in his swimming pool five years ago. "I have always said I wanted to speak to Terry face to face but I wanted it to be totally in private. It will be too emotional for us for other people to be there," Barrymore told the *Sun* team of Antonella Lazzeri, Kathryn Lister, Thomas Whitaker and photographer Roger Crump who accompanied him to the meeting and documented it over five pages on Monday.

"A *Sun* probe has unearthed 'lost' evidence that seems to back his version of events," the paper revealed, before documenting at length the use of a rectal thermometer on Stuart Lubbock and statements from medical staff – all of which were documented in the press three years ago, when the paper denounced them as "ludicrous" (an opinion with which Essex police appeared to agree, ruling out the possibility of Lubbock having received his injuries in hospital in December 2003). "Not unless the thermometer was the size of a baseball bat or the paramedic had modelled his insertion technique on Mike Tyson's uppercut," scoffed columnist Richard Littlejohn in September 2002. "Pathologists agree he suffered a serious sexual assault which left him barely able to walk or sit down."

The *Sun* has now slightly clarified that point: "Pathologist Dr Michael Heath merely described the three injuries in medical terms... he did not speculate that Stuart had been sexually assaulted.... There was no forensic evidence to suggest that he had sex with anyone at all." Not that this stopped the *Sun* claiming, on 20 separate occasions since 2001, that Lubbock had had "violent gay sex with at least one man". The *Sun*'s last mention came as recently as 6 January, when columnist Fergus Shanahan devoted his page to how "there wasn't a bucket big enough to be ill into last night as Michael Barrymore returned to pollute our TV screens".

French pianist adds a certain *je nais se quoi*

BBC National Orchestra and Chorus of Wales

Whaleballs

"Our modern age might take the whale's fate as an omen of a world out of kilter. Last month, in the shallow waters off Cape Town, six Arnoux's beaked whales, equally seldom-seen denizens of deep water, made a similarly unusual appearance close to shore. Scientists feared that they too, like the Thames whale, would meet a sad end. Yet they disappeared back into the ocean, leaving only their mysterious mottled shapes in afterimage, these antediluvian ghosts come to haunt us with our collective sins." – Philip Hoare, *Independent on Sunday*.

"Tell me, Peter, does this species of whale lead a solitary life in the ocean, or does it exist alone?" – *Sky News* reporter.

"Those who lined the Embankment to watch the whale's doomed journey maybe felt a genetic twinge of nostalgia, too. When we crawled out of the ocean those billions of years ago, the whale was among the mammals we left behind... Either way, we have obligations. Which makes it so tragic that this time London's efforts to repay an ancient debt failed." – *Observer* editorial.

"The fuss over the whale in the Thames was all very creditable, but would the same trouble have been taken to save a salmon?" – Letter in *Daily Mail*.

"The interesting thing about the whale is that it died in the same part of the river as Princess Pocahontas... There is something quite poignant in this connection: exotic cargoes both. Symbols of something magical and extraordinary. We shouldn't commemorate this fabulous event, a symbol of ecological hurt and damage, with anything as fatuous as a physical memorial... Far truer to the pragmatic and cruel spirit of place would be a decision to boil the creature at the site of the millennium dome on Bugsby's Marshes – where such things traditionally happened." – Iain Sinclair, *Guardian*.

"In Shakespeare, mighty events are heralded by portents, such as the presence of strange, out-of-place animals. Indeed, the death of Cromwell in 1658 was preceded by the arrival of a large whale in the River Thames. What does yesterday's visitor portend? A currency crash? War with Iran? It cannot come to good." – Editorial in *Daily Telegraph*.

"The whale should be preserved by plastination, in slices. Life comes from the organs, not the bones. It didn't die from its bones. I am fascinated by this creature; this whale deserves to have a more scientific, brilliant, didactic future." – Professor Gunther von Hagens, *Guardian*.

"We should hollow it out and turn it into a sightseeing boat so it would forever be bobbing in the Thames. It would have to have oars or paddles of some sort to ensure it's green. Otherwise, it could lie rotting on a floating plinth, which would make an interesting, unpleasant spectacle." – Dinos Chapman, *Guardian*.

"No one has given it a name," said Mark Simmonds, at the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society. "It would be too painful if it passes away. It's not a good prognosis." – *Guardian*.

"The whale was christened Willy..." – *Daily Mail*.

"The 18ft youngster, dubbed Wally..." – *Sun*.

"We shall call him Billy, because we do not know his name..." – *Times*.

"The whale... was called Pete the Pilot after the Celebrity Big Brother star Pete Burns..." – *Evening Standard*.

"The whale – variously named as Willy, Wally and Celebrity Big Blubber..." – *Sunday Times*.

"The young female, nicknamed Whaley..." – *Daily Mirror*.

"Wilma the whale... is to be laid to rest in the Natural History Museum." – *Times*.

CNN presenter Daryn Kagan: "Has the media there dubbed the whale with a name?" London correspondent Becky Anderson: "Moby Dick."

"We hope the whale which visited the UK houses of parliament can act as ambassador for all whales." – Emma Sterling of the International Fund for Animal Welfare, *Guardian*.

"The London whale appeared over the same weekend that the international three year lectionary used by Catholics and Protestants throughout the world prescribed Jonah chapter 3 for the Old Testament reading. This is where Jonah says Nineveh, the London or New York of his day, will be overthrown in 40 days... With the oil running out and global warming beginning to gallop and the continuing hideous aggression of the USA, perhaps the poor creature was giving us a hint." – Letter from the Rev David Perry, *Independent*.

"If our fish stocks had not been managed through the EU, perhaps there would have been more food for this whale." – Bill Wiggin MP, shadow agriculture minister, *Independent*.

"It is sad that there was such an absence of credit given to the role of the Port of London Authority... for the provision of the heavylift craft upon which the wretched creature breathed its last." – *Lloyd's List*.

"The *Mirror* has adopted a whale to keep alive the spirit of doomed Thames visitor Whaley." – *Daily Mirror*.

"The *Sun* today launches a £10,000 appeal to save Wally the Whale's bones for the nation." – *Sun*.

"Last time a whale sailed up the Thames was 1658. The next day Cromwell died. And with him went the killjoys who would have embraced this politically correct world, hating as they did the life-enhancing qualities of partying, smoking, over-eating and generally enjoying oneself. If Wilma was an omen, tragic though her fate was, we have much to celebrate." – Sue Carroll, *Daily Mirror*.

"A civilisation that enjoyed a proper relationship with the natural world would have known exactly what to do with the whale when it arrived up river. We would have slaughtered it at once, and then found a sound commercial use for the blubber and sold the oil for lighting." – Peter Oborne, *Evening Standard*.

WORLD OF SPIN

THE Financial Services Authority has long been a laughing stock among City hacks, and this seems unlikely to change following its latest hiring. Former financial hack turned PR man John Murray has been appointed head of communications, following a long and no doubt diligent search by headhunters.

Colleagues of Murray know him to be short on substance but very long on blarney. After a glittering career on the subs' desk at the *Independent on Sunday* he moved to the *Express*, before bailing out to run the "communications" department at Telewest – jumping ship just before it went skint.

Murray then joined up with former *Sunday Times* hack Rory Godson to form the PR agency Powerscourt, which quickly acquired a colourful list of clients – including legendary Irish gambler J.P. McManus, horse breeder John Magnier and WestLB banker Robin Saunders, aka "the Claudia Schiffer of the City". Alas! With Murray as her spin-doctor, Saunders's reputation was soon badly tainted: WestLB racked up losses of £1.1bn thanks to disastrous loans and investments by the principal finance department which she headed. Saunders left the bank soon afterwards and was subjected to an investigation by the Financial Services Authority – the very outfit that has now recruited her spin-doctor!

Bel Mooney
'I need to stop being a drunken trollop'
times2

IS THERE an April 2004 record of a discussion between Tony Blair and George Bush about bombing the Al Jazeera television station in Qatar or not?

The prime minister's official spokesman appeared to scotch that rumour in January when he told journalists: "The memo did not refer to bombing the Al-Jazeera television station in Qatar, despite various allegations to the contrary." However, Downing Street has sent a very different message to Steve Wood, a lecturer at John Moores University.

In November, when reports of the memo first appeared, Mr Wood sent in a request on the subject under the Freedom of Information Act. Just before Christmas he received a response that said: "Thank you for your e-mail of 24 November in which you request a copy of any memos or notes that record President Bush's discussions with the Prime Minister about the bombing of the al-Jazeera television station in Qatar… I can confirm that the Cabinet Office holds information which is relevant to your request."

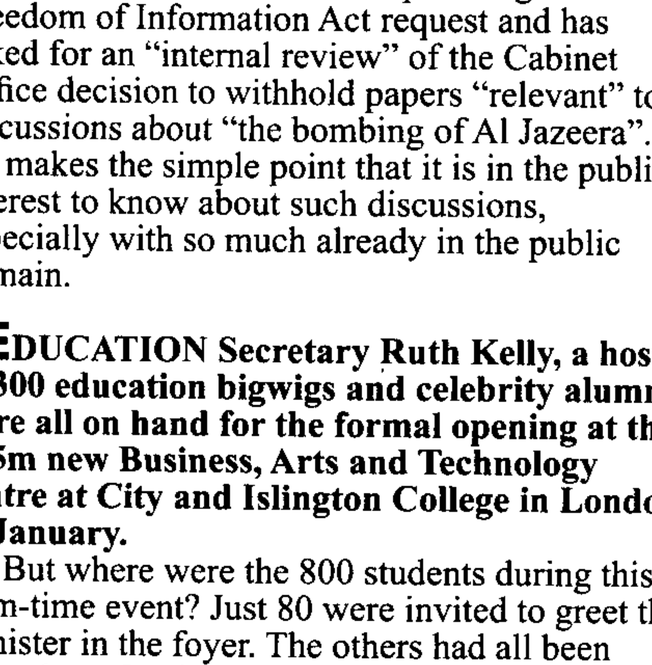
The official did not believe it was in the "public interest" to hand over this relevant information, but did confirm it existed. The letter from Downing Street correctly states that Mr Wood only asked for papers relating to discussions about bombing Al Jazeera. If there really is no mention of bombing Al Jazeera, the correct answer to the request would be to say there is no relevant information.

Meanwhile Steve Wood is pursuing his Freedom of Information Act request and has asked for an "internal review" of the Cabinet Office decision to withhold papers "relevant" to discussions about "the bombing of Al Jazeera". He makes the simple point that it is in the public interest to know about such discussions, especially with so much already in the public domain.

EDUCATION Secretary Ruth Kelly, a host of 300 education bigwigs and celebrity alumni were all on hand for the formal opening at the £15m new Business, Arts and Technology centre at City and Islington College in London in January.

But where were the 800 students during this term-time event? Just 80 were invited to greet the minister in the foyer. The others had all been booted out for the morning to stop the place looking untidy with people being educated.

The last new building at the college was opened in 1999 by Prince Charles, who required no such clearing of the decks.



"The Whips want to see me"

CONSTITUENTS of Labour MPs must be getting used to the "have you stopped beating your wife?" tactics of so-called local consultations by now *(Readers: please keep sending them in. Ed.)*

Loyal Blairite Siobhain McDonagh is the latest – pushing the party line on Academy schools in her constituency of Mitcham and Morden. While Merton Council prepares to run a consultation on two local schools, the MP sent her own forms out to constituents, offering two choices: "Yes I am in favour of raising standards at Mitcham Vale and Tamworth Manor High Schools by getting Academy status" or "No, I am against these changes to Mitcham Vale and Tamworth Manor High Schools designed to improve exam results."

MARK OATEN promised to be a "new type of MP" when he was elected by a margin of just two votes at Winchester in 1997.

Quite how out of the usual mould became apparent last week, when the *News of the Screws* revealed his penchant for "unspeakable acts of degradation" with male prostitutes.

In hindsight, perhaps, there may have been signs that this was no normal grey-man-in-a-suit quite soon after his election, when Oaten hired as a "researcher" one Jason Sutton (pictured), a former Labour county councillor in Hampshire, who had defected to the Lib Dems.

Sutton was the subject of a police investigation in 1998, for an alleged breach of the 1981 Forgery and Counterfeiting Act, when he produced an local election leaflet in Winchester that appeared to be from Labour (*Eye* 951). Headed "An important message from Tony Blair", it urged voters to vote tactically and back the Lib Dems in two marginal wards in order to keep the Tories out. Only on close inspection was it clear that the leaflet originated with the Lib Dems. Enough electors were swayed for Labour to lose those seats on polling day.

Oaten repeatedly refused to disown or even chide his protégé, despite the deep disquiet of many local Lib Dem activists. He had even helped deliver dozens of the offending leaflets.

Sutton subsequently left Oaten's office to launch a new career – as "Miss Jason", a Lily Savage-style drag queen whose "tv" show "Dingly Down Under" is a favourite at gay pubs and clubs along the south coast.

ID CARDS

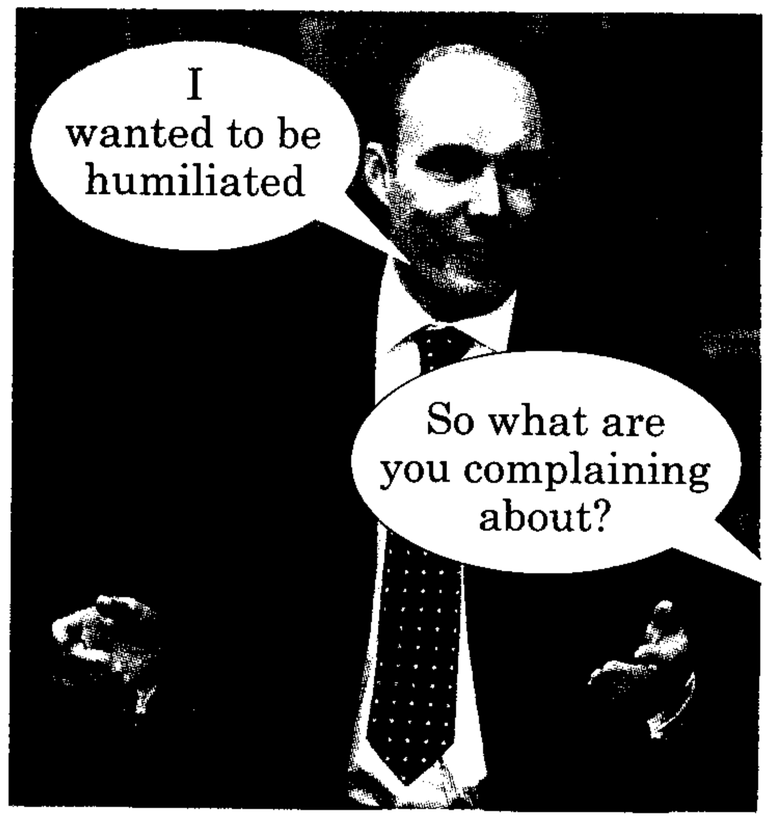
WHY was accountancy firm KPMG so keen to help get the government off the hook over identity cards after ID plans were thrown out by the House of Lords?

Peers insisted the full costs of the scheme should be democratically scrutinised, so ministers instantly set up an "independent" study by KPMG. Hey presto, Home Office Minister Andy Burnham was able to claim that the beancounters had found the government figures "robust and appropriate".

Rubbish. The bit of the KPMG report the Home Office will publish (the full version is secret) gives no such guarantee. It merely notes that the "the methodology used to cost the ID cards proposals is robust and appropriate for this stage of development". It also said that costs were "based on appropriate benchmarks" (not that they were accurate).

Academics at the London School of Economics say the cards will cost between £10bn and £19bn – figures dismissed by the government as "scaremongering". Could KPMG's more upbeat view be related in any way to its hunt for lucrative government contracts elsewhere?

OATEN SHOCK



NUCLEAR NEWS

EVERYONE knows how keen Tony Blair is on new nuclear power stations, but will the atomic lobby be able to convince Chancellor Gordon Brown? After all, any new stations will need hidden subsidies, like government guarantees to clear up their long-term waste for them.

Happily (for the atomic lobby, anyway), it turns out that the Brownites are a bit of a nuclear family. Not only is former top nuclear lobbyist Tony Cooper the father of key Brownite MP Yvette Cooper, but Gordon himself has his own radioactive relative. His younger brother Andrew is the chief British spin doctor for EDF Energy, the UK subsidiary of EDF, which operates many nuclear power stations in its native France.

Andrew Brown moved from a television job, via a brief stint at lobbyist Weber Shandwick, into his current post as head of press for EDF, where his boss is Vincent De Rivaz. De Rivaz has become a major lobbyist for nuclear power in the UK. He appeared before parliament to tell MPs that nuclear was on the cards and produce a poll saying that most Brits want nuclear power. He has also briefed newspapers on how much his firm wants to build atomic power plants in Britain – if they get the proper "risk mitigation" from the government.

However, as the late Paul Foot once noted, Vincent De Rivaz is not always good at judging success. He held a ceremony to close down London Underground's emergency generator in October 2002, with Transport Minister John Spellar in attendance. EDF was offering a new, exciting, privately financed way of keeping electricity on the tracks to replace the cranky old machines. Within a year of the ceremony London Underground was hit by a blackout that stranded passengers for hours. Very embarrassing, but having the chancellor's brother on the payroll should cancel out that black mark.

PS: As *Eye* 1145 predicted, the British company Amec has joined up with the publicly-owned Atomic Energy Authority to bid for nuclear clean-up contracts from the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA). This deal was widely reported, particularly the advantage Amec wins by jointly bidding for public contracts in partnership with a public body (both the Atomic Energy Authority and the NDA are run by the Department of Trade and Industry. However, no one noticed the other obvious advantage Amec has in bidding for NDA work. It recently hired former Labour minister Brian Wilson as a board member; and it was of course Wilson who, as Energy Minister, set up the authority in the first place.

THE BULLSHITTING BARONESS

MORE on Sovereign Strategy, the lobbying company with multiple – but not, *Private Eye* has discovered, always honest – "new" Labour connections.

The directors of Sovereign include chairman Alan Donnelly, once Labour's leader in the European parliament; former cabinet member Jack Cunningham; former Labour MEP Carol Tongue; current Labour MEP (and chair of the European parliament's influential internal market committee) Arlene McCarthy; while ex-Defence Minister Lewis Moonie acts as a consultant. Also on the board is another Brussels veteran, Angela Billingham, since ennobled as Baroness Billingham (pictured) – and, according to Sovereign's website last week, "on the ministerial team for the Department of Culture, Media and Sport".

But would even Labour at its most brazen breach the ministerial code by allowing a paid lobbyist to be a minister? A quick check with the DCMS confirmed that, no, Baroness Billingham isn't, and never has been, on the ministerial team. She is merely a "liaison peer" recruited by the whips to drum up support during debates. The boast of ministerial office, presumably designed to attract business, was simply false.

The DCMS quickly told Sovereign to change the bullshitting Baroness's details, whereupon she became an "informal spokesperson for the Labour party on culture, media and sport". Attempts by the *Eye* to verify this led to Labour's leader in the Lords, Baroness Amos, whose spokeswoman provided the following illumination: "All Labour peers can speak on all departmental issues in both or either a personal capacity or as a member of the Labour party. Baroness Billingham often speaks on DCMS matters in addition to other departmental matters." Thus "new" Labour appears unconcerned with politicians speaking on its behalf – and advertising the fact that they do – while lobbying for those with commercial interests in the same policies.

Billingham joined the Sovereign board in April 2003, a fact that chief executive Iain Malcolm (Donnelly's former chief-of-staff in Europe) wouldn't disclose, so touchy was he on the subject. Not long afterwards she was asking questions that were very helpful to Sovereign's clients and started to take a keen interest in the rights of cigarette companies to advertise their names in Britain *after* the tobacco advertising ban took effect.

In a 2004 parliamentary question she asked whether the government would amend the legislation to make it clear sponsorship of events outside the EU, beamed into Britain on TV, wouldn't be banned. Happily for Sovereign's highest-profile client, Formula 1, a few months later (and after he had been guest of honour at a Sovereign dinner) Sports Minister Richard Caborn confirmed to F1's governing body, also a Sovereign client, that the ban would not hit such broadcasts.

Sovereign's latest success was to organize the North East Economic Forum in November, attracting a star-studded "new" Labour line-up: Tony Blair, Peter Mandelson, Alan Milburn, David Miliband and Lord Adonis. This was too good an opportunity for one of Sovereign's clients with an interest in current policy to pass up. The chairman of Fluor, an American company looking for openings in the UK nuclear market, opened the forum with a speech on his company's achievements, naturally omitting any mention of its far from spotless safety record (see *Eye* 1143). He then introduced the prime minister: "Albert Einstein once defined leaders as 'the bridges that connect people to the future'. That, I believe, is what the prime minister seeks to do…" Such adroit brown-nosing won't do his firm any harm, while once again Sovereign fulfils its promise to provide a client with "pathways to the decision makers in national governments."

ETHICS GIRL

INTERVIEWED by the *Guardian*'s Society supplement on 18 January, Mary Archer, chair of Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, was asked what qualities were essential in the chair of a public body. She loftily informed hack Alison Benjamin that "Nolan's principles of openness, honesty, probity and accountability are hard to improve."

Lest we forget, Lady Archer's commitment to openness includes seeking an injunction against a former PA forbidding her from revealing any details of her employment (and bankrupting her in the process), as well as making clandestine tape recordings of conversations she thinks back up her version of events surrounding her husband's conviction for perjury; her honesty was called into question by Mr Justice Potts at her husband's 2001 trial for perjury; her probity was the subject of a DTI inquiry into her husband's purchase of shares in Anglia when she was a director of the company; and her resistance to accountability extended to bombarding publishers Simon & Schuster and author Margaret Crick with threats of legal action and demands under the Data Protection Act in an attempt to stop them releasing an unauthorised biography (*Mary Archer, For Richer For Poorer*, 2005).

Asked what she felt were "the main obstacles to achieving good governance", Lady Archer listed "unwillingness to accept challenge; tolerance of poor performance; failure to listen to what others tell you". Since Mary continues to maintain that her husband was the victim of a terrible injustice and to insist that they will appeal against his conviction, she would seem to possess all these attributes in spades. She did, however, assure the paper that she has "an appreciation of the importance of evidence as compared with opinion", which might come as something of a surprise to Mr Justice Potts.

PFI-RE NEWS

FIRE chiefs in Northumberland are working hard to convince locals of the merits of privately-funded out-of-town fire stations.

They want to close down four town centre fire stations in the county and replace them with two in less central locations – one on an out-of-town business park – built under a £10m PFI deal. The move will mean 28 firefighters losing their jobs, but bosses say the new locations will make it easier to respond to serious road accidents, floods and terrorist alerts.

But what about fires?

With impeccable logic, the firefighters themselves say that moving the stations away from populated areas is bound to increase response times and thus cost lives in fires.

With a public consultation over the scheme going on in January, chief fire officer Brian Hesler pounced on a national Audit Commission report on fire services last month, which praised Northumberland's leadership and community safety schemes. He claimed it "shot down" the Fire Brigades Union arguments against the deal, which was a little baffling, since the commission hadn't even looked at how the service handles emergencies.

He went on to reassure everyone that fire-related deaths would be reduced by "innovative prevention schemes" (aka giving out smoke detectors and deep fat fryers) rather than quick response times. How comforting.

"I won't believe he's running for leader until he denies it"

Down on the Farm

A PERPETUAL puzzle about the Department for the Elimination of Farming and Rural Affairs (Defra) is why its ministers and officials behave in the extraordinary way they do. popular theory is that Defra is working to a cunning grand plan: its aim being to destroy what remains of Britain's agriculture as quickly and inhumanely as possible.

Certainly this might seem the only explanation for the bizarre shambles Defra has made of its arrangements for passing on to farmers the money received from Brussels under the EU's new "single farm payment" system. This was meant to "simplify" the legendary complexities of the EU's subsidy system, and in most countries of Europe (including Scotland and Wales) the cash, due at the end of last year, seems to have been handed out as intended.

In England, however, Defra, having devised a uniquely complicated system for apportioning these new subsidies, then commissioned a firm of consultants, Accenture, for £18m, to come up with a new IT system to administer their payment. In keeping with its corporate slogan, "high performance delivered", Accenture's bill to the taxpayers quickly doubled, to £37m. The only problem was that its IT system proved not to work, so the farmers have so far not received a penny. This in turn has forced them to borrow from banks to cover the delay in receiving what they were promised, the latest estimate being that this will cost them an additional £25m in interest charges.

Defra thus remains happily sitting on the vast pile of money which Brussels intended should be given to the farmers, described by MPs as "unacceptable". Lord Bach, the ministerial underling whom Mrs Beckett has put in charge of this fiasco, says the MPs are only complaining because the chairman of their farming committee is a Tory. Meanwhile Accenture continues to boast on its website about how its "leading-edge technologies", "global resources" and "proven track record" enable it to "identify opportunities and drive business process improvements". Certainly it seems to have identified a fine opportunity here for Accenture, which has so far managed to double its own money, with no prospect of the farmers being paid what they are owed for weeks or months to come. But if this is part of Defra's cunning plan to destroy our farming industry, it can only be congratulated on the efficiency with which it is achieving its objective.

'Muckspreader'

HIGH PRINCIPALS

PROFESSOR Gerry McKenna, former vice-chancellor of the University of Ulster (UU), should finally be packing to leave his university residence after the university had to go to the high court to force him to step down from the £200,000-a-year post as "president".

Prof McKenna went on open-ended sabbatical in 2004 (*Eye* 1123) and an investigation by Sir Michael Buckley into his conduct as vice-chancellor last year concluded that he had a case to answer regarding allegations of lax financial controls, attending official meetings impaired by alcohol and harsh treatment of staff. He agreed to step down and take on the newly-created one-year role of president, starting from last August, but never came back to work.

He was told before Christmas that he was to be sacked from 2 January, rather than to leave as planned in July. Lawyers finally agreed a leaving date of 28 February, with the university agreeing to pay the professor's legal bills, as well as its own – totalling around £50,000.

Reporters in Belfast have calculated that, including the 15 months for which he was paid £250,000 without attending work, getting rid of Prof McKenna has cost UU £400,000.

TV

The West Wing (E4)
Desperate Housewives (C4)
Lost (C4)
Invasion (C4)
The Office (NBC)

THE news that the current and seventh series of *The West Wing* will be the last has been greeted with dismay in Britain by the few remaining Washington wonks who have been willing to buy the increasingly sophisticated alarm-clocks and reception equipment to catch it in the outlying parts of the Channel 4 empire. There will also be regret at the American parent network, NBC, about the loss of so reliable a revenue-generator.

The series, though, is a perfect case-study in the central flaw of American television drama and one from which other newer imported hits in the 4 schedules could learn.

The biggest difference between US and UK drama commissioning has always been one of length. It's almost inconceivable, for example, that an American network would ever have commissioned something like Paul Abbot's BBC political drama *State of Play*, a self-contained six-parter. In the States, a play needs to have the potential to fill at least six months of slots and, ideally, to do so for at least five years. The reason for this is that syndication (the lucrative after-life on re-run channels) requires at least 100 episodes.

So, whereas Ricky Gervais was able in Blighty to do a John Cleese and knock *The Office* on the head after 14 episodes, the American spin-off **The Office** – **An American Workplace** – has just been commissioned for a third series which will contain 21 episodes. David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* remains a very rare example of a narrative that was allowed to lapse after one season and even that spawned an unwise cinematic spin-off. So, while the New York and Los Angeles bookstores are full of best-selling volumes about knowing when to get out of a relationship (with titles like *Honey, It's So Over*), dramas tend to drift on in a state of denial.

In this context, *The West Wing* was always an interesting test of the willingness to let go. Because of the scrupulous constitutional accuracy to which the show's creator, Aaron Sorkin, aspired, it was always the plan that, no matter how successful the show was, it would last only as long as the two four-year terms which the founding fathers were prepared to let Martin Sheen serve.

"This time, forget your lines. We need something for the DVD extras"

But, inevitably, by series six, the network was as reluctant to give up advertising revenue as presidents would be to forego tax revenue and so Jimmy Smits and Alan Alda were brought in to fight an election race which could have carried the series on with a new man in the big chair. Audiences, though, have declined too far for such a jump and it's not hard to see why. The main creative inspiration, Sorkin, had long since left and, with President Bartlett already shot, sick, indicted and having suffered the kidnap of a daughter, it was clear that they were running out of storylines for him.

And, if that happened even with a series where the plot had a built-in forward momentum (the following of an actual political calendar), then the future is ominous for Channel 4's younger American imports. This crop was refreshing because, at the beginning, they genuinely seemed not to be obsessed with staying in the schedules until syndication kicked in. Each had a storyline which seemed in some way unsustainable. **Desperate Housewives** seemed, like *Twin Peaks*, to have a single continuing story of a character's death which would be resolved over one season. **Lost** followed the immediate aftermath of a plane-crash on a remote island and raised the obvious logical obstacle of how long, with modern satellite technology and so on, people could remain stranded. And **Invasion**, with its alien infiltration storyline, is using a narrative which has played out and resolved within two hours in numerous sub-HG Wells movies.

Sensibly, each of these shows should have finished after one season. But, the pressures of revenue-greed and scheduling familiarity being what they are, *Desperate Housewives II* has come along and the characters in *Lost* can be expected to spend at least another year on their unfindable island, the scriptwriters becoming ever vaguer about time, so that a few hours of action stretch over several weeks of episodes.

The conventional wisdom is that the best American television drama contains style and ideas which the Brits find hard to match. It's still true, for at least the first 10 or 15 episodes. But the length of a drama should be dictated by the story's plausible possibilities, not the hunger for a cash-cow. There has been much speculation about how *The West Wing* will end. Let's hope that Bartlett goes for a constitutional amendment limiting hit American drama series to a maximum of three years.

'Remote Controller'

MEDIA NEWS

"CITIZEN journalism sounds far too pompous. I prefer viewer contributions," explained Sky's head of news Nick Pollard in an interview with the *Observer* on 22 January, when asked about the new fad of members of the public sending in phonecam footage of breaking news events.

"I don't see why any news organisation shouldn't investigate things and try to break stories. You can do that without compromising your ability to produce rolling news."

While Pollard was speaking to the *Observer*, Sky News seemed to prove his point by breaking a story that a second northern bottle-nosed whale had been spotted near Southend. To back this up, it screened a photo sent in by a viewer of what looked like a large mammal thrashing around in the sea. Alas! It soon emerged that this was a fake.

On the same day Sky News put everything else on hold to cover the travails of the Thames whale, Pollard was hit with the bombshell that Sky political editor Adam Boulton's producer Bob Mills had quit, complaining that no one knew what they were doing at Sky any more. So much for Pollard's much publicised relaunch of the channel!

AS IF the Welsh Assembly didn't have enough lawyers and advisers of its own, a top BBC executive has now been loaned to the assembly to advise on the impact of the Government of Wales Bill, currently making its way through Westminster.

The executive in question is Aled Eurig, the Beeb's Cardiff-based head of corporate social responsibility. He'll be bending the ear of presiding officer Lord Elis-Thomas, giving advice on how the changes will affect the assembly's powers and speaking to the media on constitutional change.

The BBC will continue to pay Eurig's salary throughout the six-month secondment of its board member, saying he won't be doing any party political work. However, he should get along just fine with his new boss – just as he did when he was Dafydd Elis-Thomas's parliamentary assistant, working for Plaid Cymru in the 1980s.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Always see change through, as unfinished initiatives create cynicism and apathy toward future change programmes."

– Stephen Dando, director of "BBC People", on the 50 Lessons *business training website. Mr Dando will be seeing through the massive changes at the BBC (outsourcing around half of the HR department and axing 6,000 staff) by... taking up a new job at Reuters in the spring, it was announced last week.*

Autopsy
IF WE DISSECT IT...
WE DISCOVER THAT DEEP DOWN...
THIS IS JUST A PRURIENT, CHEAP SLASHER SHOW DRESSED UP AS PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING
Ken Pyne

IN THE last *Eye* we recalled that only a year ago George Galloway savaged Tony Blair for spending more time on daytime TV sofas than in the House of Commons. Galloway was particularly scornful of "an excruciating excursion by the prime minister of Great Britain on the *Richard and Judy Show*" in which Blair took part in a quiz called "You Say We Pay".

With sublime inevitability, no sooner had the *Eye* hit the news-stands than a live link-up from the *Celebrity Big Brother* house enabled Galloway himself to appear on… the *Richard and Judy* show, participating in "You Say We Pay".

But was this an "excruciating excursion"? Apparently not. After Galloway's eviction from the house last Wednesday, Davina McCall asked: "What do you think will be your defining moment?" To which the Hon. Member for Bethnal Green & Bow replied without hesitation: "Oh, Richard and Judy, definitely."

His admiration for his new friends did not wear off in the cold light of day. On the day after he left the Big Brother house, Galloway was offered a number of radio and TV appearances to explain exactly why he had taken part in the show. He declined interview requests from *Channel 4 News* and *Newsnight* in favour of being grilled on… the *Richard and Judy* show!

Number crunchings

£5000

■ Cost to British Divers Marine Life Rescue charity of attempt to save the Whale in the Thames

£5000

■ Cost to BBC of having a helicopter in air for seven hours watching it

JUST FANCY THAT2

"...there is a circumcision scene, but that could be cut, or a little bit of it could be cut..."

– A Radio 4 discussion on whether 'A Cock And Bull Story' (based on Tristram Shandy, by Lawrence Sterne) would be exportable to USA.

BESIDES campaigning to save the UK Theme, Radio 4 listeners might also spare a moment to complain about the amount of lies and puffery from Tesco which the BBC station seems willing to tolerate.

On 18 January, Tesco finance director Andrew Higginson was interviewed on the *Today* programme following a damning report on the supermarket chain by Friends of the Earth. Higginson dismissed the report as fiction and attacked FoE for repeatedly refusing to meet the company.

This was untrue, as Higginson well knew. In fact Tesco and FoE have a "continuing dialogue": they had met two weeks previously, and were due to meet again later in January. When FoE rang Higginson to protest about his allegation, he cheerfully confessed his sins. But the false impression given to Radio 4 listeners remains uncorrected.

Tesco also featured in a discussion on Radio 4's *Broadcasting House* programme last Sunday, with guests including former *Sun* editor David Yelland. After a heated argument about whether Britain had a world-class retailer or not (and the consensus was that it didn't), Yelland announced that in fact it did – and Tesco was that retailer. Both he and *Broadcasting House* presenter Matthew Bannister forgot to mention that one of Yelland's lucrative jobs these days is as "strategic PR consultant" to… Tesco. No doubt his retainer will be upped still further following this gratuitous puff.

WITH highbrow "adult programming" now safely relegated to digital channel More 4, Channel 4 is busy getting on with what it does best – as an email currently being circulated by producers at independent Testimony Films demonstrates.

"Channel 4 are making a documentary about stag and hen parties in the 1990s, for part of a series about sex in the nineties. Were you the stag, the hen, or maybe the strip o gram [sic]? Were you tempted to have sex when you were boozed up for a good time in places like Dublin, Amsterdam or Blackpool? Did things get out of hand? Did the truth come out before the wedding, after or never? We want to hear about sexual adventures of that last weekend of freedom. Ultimate would be to find a groom who pulled on his stag night – but any member of the stag party would be great."

IN THE latest TV financial self-help show, BBC2's *Pay off your mortgage in 2 years*, presenter Rene Carayol encourages his subjects to work harder, start businesses and spend less.

And who better to promote such enterprise and thrift than self-styled financial guru Carayol? As *Eye* 1136 revealed, he is the same financial guru (and former Inland Revenue director) who last year was served with a demand under the Insolvency Act for £97,000 back taxes, penalties and interest. Since then the *Eye* has learnt that his company, Carayol Ltd, has been in a similar spot of trouble, facing arrears of more than £50,000.

Stand by for the sequel: "Pay your overdue tax bills by making TV programmes on managing personal finances".

DUMB BRITAIN

The Big Quiz with Gary King, LBC

Gary King: What was the first name of Mr Birdseye, the inventor of Frozen food?

Contestant: Captain.

Chappers and Dave, Radio 1

Chappers *(or possibly* **Dave***)*: What is the fat on a whale called?

Contestant: Chewing gum.

University Challenge, BBC2

Jeremy Paxman: Which member of the royal family died in 2002 aged 101?

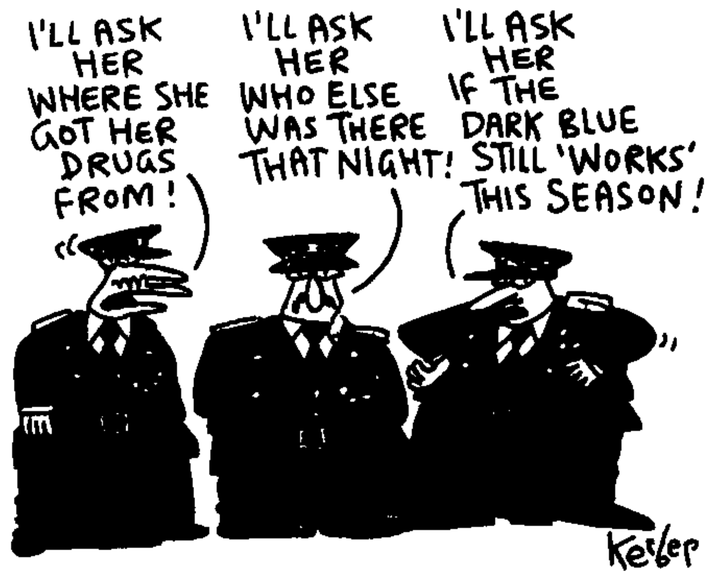
Oxford student: Princess Margaret.

Steve Wright's Big Quiz, Radio 2

Steve Wright: On which mode of transport would you find a crow's nest?

Contestant: A plane.

POLICE QUESTION KATE MOSS


I'LL ASK HER WHERE SHE GOT HER DRUGS FROM!
I'LL ASK HER WHO ELSE WAS THERE THAT NIGHT!
I'LL ASK HER IF THE DARK BLUE STILL 'WORKS' THIS SEASON!
Kerber

AD NAUSEAM

TRADITIONAL TV advertising is slowly but surely dying a death as online and direct marketing take over. All over adland creative directors claim they are powerless to do anything about it, and hark back to the heady days when blue-chip clients would spend millions on a 60-second spot, the agency would get 20 percent commission and they'd get a Porsche. So a suggestion, if we may: try coming up with something original?

Compare and contrast some of this year's offerings so far: "You do the moods, we'll do the coffee." (Nescafe/McCann's); "You do the maths, we'll do the pizza." (Pizza Hut/Wieden & Kennedy); "You do the football, we'll do the beer." (Budweiser/Rainey Kelly Campbell Roalfe). You do something less derivative, we'll stop fast-forwarding.

Then there has been the "new" campaign for Toyota's Yaris, a small Japanese hatchback whose press work has hinged on the hoary old feint of a dictionary definition of a made-up word: "bigsmall, adj. something small that has the characteristics of something much bigger." Peter Mandelson's favourite agency, Clemmow Hornby Inge (*Eyes passim*), got £50m for this masterpiece, and yet it bears an uncanny resemblance to a recent campaign for another small Japanese hatchback, Nissan's Micra. TBWA's 2003 "Do You Speak Micra?" slots dreamt up similar neologisms like "Compacious – compact + spacious" in a bid to suggest, er, something small that has the characteristics of something much bigger. No wonder people are switching off – lazy rehashings of ideas that were limp from the outset are what video and DVD recorders were invented for...

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

LEVI'S BRINGING OUT JEANS THAT HOLD iPODS.....
LEVI'S
AND WHERE DO THE TWO LONG "WIREY" BITS GO?
OH, YOU JUST PUT YOUR LEGS THROUGH HERE!

DOING THE ROUNDS

Dr Foster clones again

AS predicted in the last *Eye*, Health Secretary Patsy Hewitt has issued a statement announcing "a new public private partnership formed through a joint venture between the Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC) [a special health authority established on 1 April 2005] and Dr Foster Ltd, a commercial provider of healthcare information."

Just to show who's in charge, the new company will have the catchy title of "Dr Foster Intelligence" and will control the collection and marketing of all NHS and social care data.

Half of this new company will in turn be owned by another new company, Dr Foster Holdings LLP, and the HSCIC (ie taxpayers) will be "investing £12m in the joint venture: a direct injection of £4.4m equity into Dr Foster Intelligence Ltd to fund working capital requirements and a payment of £7.6m to Dr Foster as a further contribution to working capital in Dr Foster Intelligence Ltd and to compensate the shareholders of Dr Foster Ltd."

Hewitt curiously fails to mention which, if any, other companies were invited to tender for this lucrative contract. An unhappy source at the HSCIC claimed that there was no such tender, and that this may have contravened European law. This prompted a member of Dr Foster's own ethics committee ("yet another separate company that seeks to monitor complaints and point out the path of virtue") to ask why there had been no competitive tender. He has yet to receive a reply.

The fact that Hewitt has taken on Matt Tee as the Department of Health's acting director of communications does not look good, considering Tee happens to be Director of Business Development at Dr Foster and one of those poor shareholders awaiting compensation. In return, Dr Foster has very kindly taken on Sir Robin Young as its deputy chairman. Sir Robin had four years working alongside Patsy at the DTI as her permanent secretary. Although he only joined in September, Sir Robin is already on the board of Dr Foster Holdings LLP, from where he has shot straight into the exclusive team of six board members for Dr Foster Intelligence (DFI). The chairmanship of this cosy cadre will apparently rotate. My money's on Sir Robin to kick off.

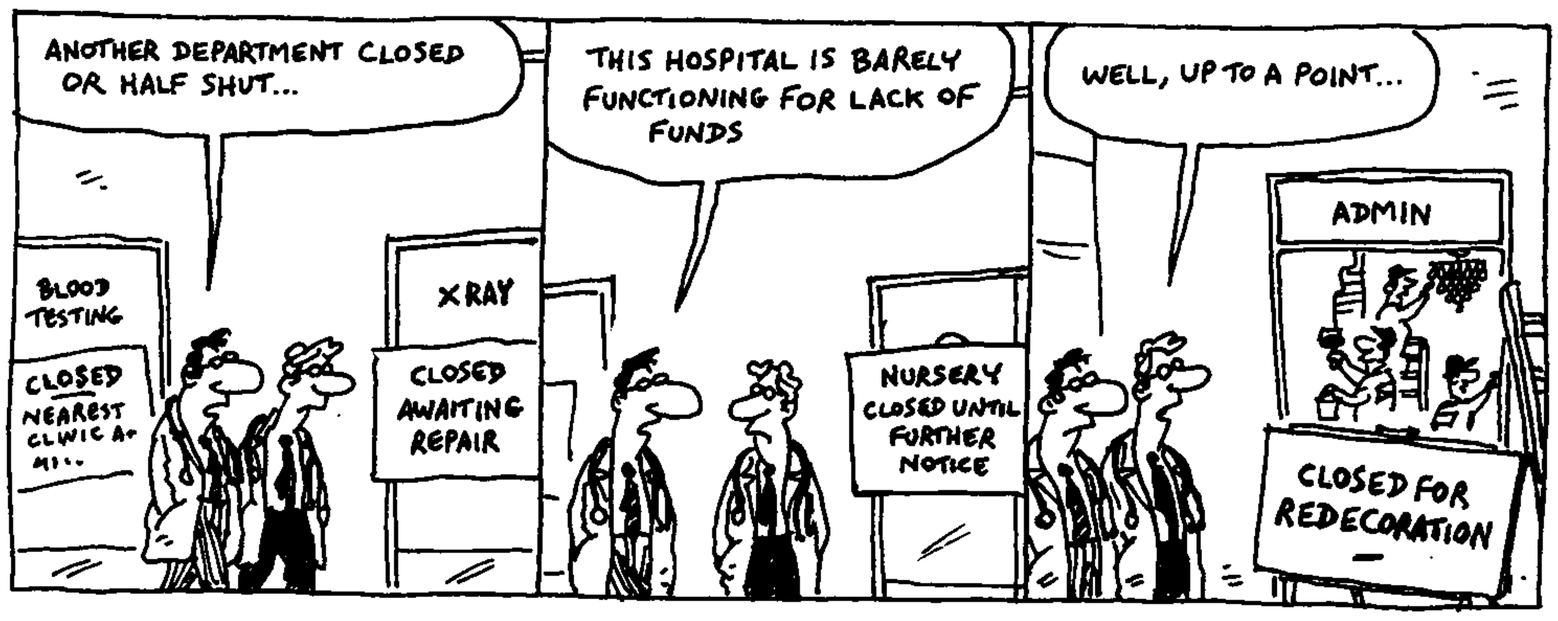
Of course, DFI (only a letter out from DTI) could turn out, as Hewitt hopes, to be "a positive and welcome example of the public and private sectors combining to work in partnership in support of better services for patients and the public". Or it could turn out to be jobs for the boys. But even more damaging is the suggestion that all the health and social information that patients are meant to use to choose services, and providers are meant to use to audit and improve services, could be subverted to suit the government's agenda while making a tidy profit for an ever increasing number of Dr Foster companies (just how many do they need?)

"New" Labour's record on public private partnership is not great. PFI contacts have saddled trusts with debts they may never recover from, and private providers of investigations and treatments have been paid over the odds for a guaranteed volume of work, even when the work wasn't done. Small wonder the NHS is a billion in the red. At the very least, Hewitt – who preaches the mantra of competition elsewhere in the NHS – could start by explaining whether or not the DFI contract was put out to tender. And if not, why not?

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY


ANOTHER DEPARTMENT CLOSED OR HALF SHUT...
BLOOD TESTING
CLOSED NEAREST CLWIC AT M...
XRAY
CLOSED AWAITING REPAIR
THIS HOSPITAL IS BARELY FUNCTIONING FOR LACK OF FUNDS
NURSERY CLOSED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE
WELL, UP TO A POINT...
ADMIN
CLOSED FOR REDECORATION

SIGNAL FAILURES

Virgin pays Virgin

ONE REASON Virgin Rail needs huge bailouts (*Eyes passim*) is the fee Virgin charges its rail franchises for use of the Virgin brand.

In a 2002 agreement between Virgin and the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA), released under the Freedom of Information Act, Virgin Rail Group agrees not to "alter the basis of fees in respect of any brand licence to its shareholders or their subsidiaries". The fees are listed as "operating costs", so are income for Virgin in addition to its guaranteed rail profits. "Management charges and brand licence fees" are paid by each of Virgin West Coast, Virgin Cross-country and Virgin Rail Group.

How much are taxpayers forking out for the honour of having the Virgin logo on trains? The transport department decided that embarrassing figure was commercially sensitive. Readers who want to guess the figure might like to know that the *Daily Telegraph* reported Richard Branson gets a £1m brand fee from Virgin Mobile – a smaller business than Virgin Rail.

CLUELESS civil servants have requested a £100m cut in train-leasing charges, having missed opportunities to nail the leasing companies during franchise negotiations.

"New" Labour can't enforce the £100m cut because it's left the three leasing companies free of regulation. The problem is British Rail's old fleet, sold off by the Tories for a song. Franchises which rely on those trains have no alternative because spare trains aren't available, so the leasing companies are free to set ludicrous charges – especially for the squalid local trains in the north. When the Northern Rail franchise was devised, officials could have threatened to buy new trains unless charges for the old ones were cut substantially. Instead they vetoed new trains. Now they're desperately trying to cut industry costs, especially on Northern Rail.

FIRSTGROUP is cheesed off that bus passengers in Glasgow have escaped its eye-watering fare rises. Its 1996 purchase of Strathclyde Buses was deemed "against the public interest" by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, which said it must sell chunks of its local bus empire. But then Labour took office and allowed FirstGroup to keep all the spoils provided fare rises were limited to the inflation rate. Now the Office of Fair Trading has agreed to review the fares cap and "anti-predation undertakings" (to stop FirstGroup bullying rivals).

"The market has changed," a FirstGroup spokeswoman told *The Herald*. "Because of the urban network in the city, with trains, subway and the overground [FirstGroup's buses], the market regulates itself. Any business will suffer if they hike prices too high."

Good point. Glasgow's trains are a serious rival, providing Britain's biggest commuter rail network outside London. But the spokeswoman forgot to say that those trains are operated by… FirstGroup. By her own argument, if FirstGroup hikes bus fares, passengers will switch to its trains. It's only 15 months since FirstGroup agreed to some more paltry restrictions as a condition of taking over the ScotRail franchise (again it wasn't forced to sell any bus operations, as National Express and Arriva had to in identical circumstances), but already WorstGroup is trying to move goalposts to exploit its monopoly.

Elsewhere FirstGroup still tries to justify huge fare rises, after the *Eye* pointed out its entire fuel supply is capped at about $37 a barrel. When the *East Anglian Daily Times* reported on anger at rises by First Eastern Counties, a FirstGroup spokesman said only 80 percent of its fuel was price-capped between April and July. "This meant the company still had to pay the market rate for 20 percent of its fuel, and oil prices rose in the wake of Hurricane Katrina to as much as $71 a barrel," the paper dutifully reported. "This meant it was paying 'significantly more' than the company had expected in its budget process."

But there's a flaw in that argument: Katrina and the oil-price hike to $71 happened in late August – the month *after* FirstGroup says it started paying no more than $37 a barrel for all its fuel.

PS: FirstGroup has demanded more cash from Manchester's transport executive, with which it has contracts to run buses for an agreed subsidy. It threatened more cuts on its non-contracted buses unless it got more subsidy to cover fuel-price increases. The executive refused bailouts and commented: "The company's calculations for such claims are difficult to verify owing to commercial sensitivity." In other words, WorstGroup won't show officials how much its fuel cost, capped at $37 a barrel, has really increased.

'Dr B. Ching'

THE COMMUTERS
RAIL FRANCHISE TAKEOVER
AT LEAST THESE NEW PEOPLE WILL BE ABLE TO GET US TO AND FROM WORK...
REPLACEMENT SERVICE
THEY'RE AN ESTABLISHED BUS COMPANY...

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

DONNY DEJA VU

IT FEELS like old times in Doncaster, where police have launched two investigations involving elected mayor Martin Winter. Knacker moved in after *Eye* 1147's story about the much-delayed district auditor's report on Winter's pet project, the Glass Park. It aimed to transform the derelict site of a former Pilkington glass factory into a "community" organic farm, garden and leisure park. But after seven years and some £2m of public money, it largely remains... a derelict former factory site. At its centre is "Prescott's Bridge" – where the deputy prime minister was photographed with Winter at the "opening" of the park in 1998. It spans a muddy swamp choked with weeds.

Although the district auditor's report – a catalogue of mismanagement, misinformation and possible fraud – dates from November 2004, the council's managing director, Susan Law, sat on it until it was leaked to the *Eye* and the local press in December. An internal inquiry then brought to light documents which gave Law no choice but to call in Knacker.

The papers are said to have left several senior managers "quaking in their boots", including former Labour party apparatchik Keith Miller (*Eyes passim*) who was in charge of single regeneration budget monies for much of the life of the project. Director of housing Miller, the last great survivor of the Donnygate scandal, has unexpectedly applied for early retirement.

Still active as a director of the Glass Park and its multiple subsidiaries is former Labour councillor Liz Jeffress, who first came to attention when she got up a petition to keep former education chair Pat Mullany out of jail following his conviction on 24 counts of expenses fraud. Back in 1987 Donny had two apprenticeships to gift to the most promising students in the area. By a remarkable coincidence one of the two was awarded to Damian Mullany, son of Pat. Sadly Damian fell among bad company and a promising bricklaying career came to naught. Damian has now resurfaced, joining his father's champion, Jeffress, on the board of the Glass Park Development Company, in which role he replaced Carolyne Hunter (aka Mrs Martin Winter).

● THE SECOND police investigation follows a complaint made under the Representation of the People Act. Not declared in Mayor Winter's expenses for his re-election last year was a mass meeting at the Doncaster Dome, hosted by Doncaster Rovers football club, a couple of weeks before the poll.

Winter, the guest of honour, was introduced by Rovers' chairman John Ryan as "the only candidate who can deliver a new stadium for the football club". Ryan urged 3,000 cheering, stamping supporters to vote for Winter: "I would, if I lived here." (Mr Ryan lives in one of the leafier parts of Cheshire.) Each one of the invited season ticket holders received a goody bag containing, among other items, a CD of the architect's guide to the new stadium to be built by Mayor Winter's council. Winter promised the meeting he would resign if the stadium was not delivered by 31 December 2007.

PS: The legal limit on campaigning expenses for the mayoral election was £10,081 per candidate. The Rovers rally alone cost £20,000.

ON THE LAMBETH

MORE on the fraud at Lambeth council, where a conman got a job in the housing department and put through invoices from a phoney company, set up by himself, for supplying non-existent central heating systems to the value of, at the latest count, £2.9m. (*Eyes* 1144 & 1147).

As the *Eye* noted last year: "Nobody at Lambeth thought to ask where the heating systems were being stored or installed. Cheques were simply signed and handed over."

Now Lambeth's auditors, Pricewaterhouse Coopers, who conducted an "Internal Control Review", have concluded that the fraud occurred for the following reasons:

1) The central heating contract had been awarded to a supplier not on the approved suppliers list; 2) Payments had been authorised without evidence that work had been completed and 3) "The overall management culture had permitted inadequate control of recruitment, contract letting and payment authorisation". Just fancy that. PwC has put in a bill for its "forensic audit costs" of, er, £500,000. Nice work!

Meanwhile Lambeth is setting aside a further £300,000 for "associated legal costs" and £100,000 to fund a "special investigation" headed by Bill Roots, a former chief executive of Westminster council.

With the conman now counting his dosh on a beach somewhere, Lambeth had to find a scapegoat. Last week director of housing Stuart Holton, who recently told members of the public that he didn't know why heating systems they had been promised had not materialised, was fired – sorry, "decided it was time to move on".

HIGHLAND FLING

NEWS that 300 Westminster council office staff could lose their jobs if they refuse to transfer 600 miles to the Scottish Highlands is hard to square with promises made by "Sir" Simon Milton, recently knighted Tory leader of the council.

When in 2002 Westminster council signed a 10-year, £240m deal with outsourcing outfit Vertex, in which the firm took over the running of 67 council services, Milton assured staff transferring to Vertex that their jobs would remain in Westminster for the duration of the contract. And last November he declared: "Public services need to be joined up and holistic, as close to the citizen as possible, usually at neighbourhood level".

Vertex has already transferred the council's human resources section to Lingley Green, near Warrington, Cheshire. Council staff wishing to contact human resources have to call a 0870 premium rate number. Every time a member of staff gets on the phone to HR, Vertex makes a profit out of the call, on top of the cost of the contract. When Vertex was told by Westminster to change the number to a standard rate line, Vertex simply ignored the request. Presumably this is what Milton means when he refers to "effective contract monitoring".

Now Vertex plans to move 300 jobs to Dingwall, near Inverness. It is unlikely many London-based staff will wish to move, so they will effectively be sacked and replaced with cheaper Scottish workers. Last week Westminster's Labour opposition leader, Paul Dimoldenberg, discovered that Westminster's duff contract with Vertex provides that the council will pay for Vertex's accommodation if a move is made away from (rent free) City Hall accommodation – in this case an eye-watering £2.53m.

● INSIGHT into what passes for political discourse in the North-west... Shortly before Christmas, Lib Dem councillor Dennis Whittle took a telephone call from Allen Brett, Labour leader of Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council. Brett, angry that a Lib Dem leaflet had revealed details of his earnings as a "leisure and property consultant", told Whittle he wanted a written apology by the following morning or Whittle would be "on his hit list". So abusive were Brett's comments that the leader of the Rochdale Lib Dem group, Alan Taylor, had to plead with a terrified Whittle not to resign. He explained that Brett "had a history of bad behaviour". This is believed to be a reference to the occasion in 1987 when Brett thumped Liberal councillor David Clayton while out canvassing. Brett was fined £75 for assault, plus £700 costs (*Eye* 791). Brett might have escaped prosecution had he not chosen the doorstep of an off-duty police officer to launch his attack.

When contacted by the Eye Brett said: "I didn't threaten him. It was a normal political conversation." Happily Whittle recorded their little chat and has put the tape in the hands of his solicitor – so what constitutes "normal political conversation" in Rochdale will be saved for posterity.

LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELDS

GOOD to see Burnley's new "new" Labour MP Kitty Ussher toeing the party line on playing field development by... slagging off campaigners who are trying to protect sports pitches within the historic council-owned grounds of Towneley Hall.

In an interview with the *Burnley Express,* Mrs Ussher accused around 1,000 residents of jumping on the "passing bandwagon" of trying to save playing fields after they objected to plans to build a new school inside Towneley Park.

Towneley Hall and Park were sold to Burnley Corporation in 1901 and are home to several museums, an aquarium, a restaurant, woodland, golf course, tennis courts and several playing fields used by local sports clubs. Last year the Heritage Lottery Fund approved a £2m grant to improve what the council described at the time as "Burnley's best loved park".

The planned school, which is to be named Unity College, is part of Burnley's £170m Building Schools for the Future project, which is to merge the borough's high schools into four new-build "super-schools". It would be built inside the area currently marked out for football and rugby.

While Mrs Ussher insists the park as a whole is not threatened by the school and that playing fields will still be available for community use, it's hard to see how a three-storey building designed for 1,050 pupils, plus the learning support centre, service and storage areas, vehicle parking and manoeuvring areas and security fencing all listed in the outline planning application will not have an impact.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

REPORT OF A FOREST FIRE IN ISLINGTON! LET'S GO! GO! GO!
FIRE SERVICE! WE'RE COMING THROUGH!
TOO LATE! TOO LATE!
I TOLD QUIN NOT TO LIGHT A JOSS STICK NEXT TO OUR BONSAI PLANTATION!

NOOKS and CORNERS

IT IS now almost 20 years since the largest development site in central London first came up for grabs: the railway lands stretching north of King's Cross Station straddling the Regent's Canal.

Various unfortunate proposals, involving mad tunnels and grotesque tower blocks, have come and gone over the years. The London Regeneration Consortium even produced a development plan in 1989 only to withdraw in 1994. Meanwhile, local community groups together with the Victorian Society and English Heritage successfully argued to keep the area's various industrial structures and historic buildings, like the magnificent Granary and German Gymnasium.

The long delay has probably been a good thing, as now more is being retained than was first proposed – including the Great Northern Hotel. Now, however, things are finally moving towards a conclusion as the new tracks into St Pancras for Eurostar trains are nearing completion, and the poor people of Bedford, Leicester, Nottingham and Derby who once arrived in Gilbert Scott's and W.H. Barlow's amazing station are relegated to a hideous concrete box behind the Victorian pile.

Argent's redevelopment model

A development plan for the whole area is about to be submitted to the London boroughs of Camden and Islington for final approval. The land is now owned by London & Continental Railways and by Exel plc who, in 2000, selected the Argent Group plc to develop the 67-acre site. Everything would be better this time: a document called *Principles for a Human City* was published, full of cheering buzz-words like "mixed use" and "consensus" about creating a "dense, vibrant and distinctive urban quarter". So far, so good: English Heritage was supportive, "convinced that the conservation-led regeneration of King's Cross is the route to successful and sustainable urban renewal."

A planning application for a £2bn development, containing 1,800 homes as well as space to create 30,000 jobs, was first submitted by Argent (Kings Cross) Ltd in May 2004 and amended in September last year. But not everyone is happy as it is still proposed to demolish some historic buildings, both listed and unlisted, even though they occupy a small part of this huge site and can still serve a useful purpose.

The King's Cross Conservation Areas Advisory Committee (KXCAAC) is particularly concerned "that the unique heritage of this site… stands to be severely compromised and damaged by the Argent proposals." With the help of expert advice, it has now produced its own detailed report on the area, *Respecting the Railway Lands*, which contains some alternative proposals.

The KXCAAC is disturbed that the hard, industrial character of the setting of the Granary is to be diluted for no good reason and that the landscape proposals ignore the origin of the space in front, which was a large canal basin. The committee is also unhappy that the great cast-iron (listed) gasholders which were removed for safe keeping are not being replaced in their original positions and are being insensitively converted to new uses.

But the most depressing aspect of Argent's current proposal is that two blocks of Victorian public housing – Stanley Buildings North (which is listed) and Culross Buildings (which isn't) – are still to come down. These lie between King's Cross Station and Goods Way, the area which was the setting for the robbery in *The Ladykillers*. They are sound and serviceable buildings whose inhabitants fought vigorously for their survival from the very beginning of the King's Cross saga. Much used by film-makers, they are also interesting: Stanley Buildings are two five-storey tenement blocks of 1864-65 and described in the new "Pevsner" for *London North* as "some of the oldest surviving working-class flats in London"; Culross Buildings were erected by the Great Northern Railway in 1891-92 for railwaymen. Both add much to the character of the area, but they are unfortunately in the way of the long "boulevards" running north from the Euston Road which Argent considers essential to open up the development site.

The KXCAAC is not necessarily being blinkered or negative. It insists it has demonstrated "enthusiasm for the principle of the regeneration… made possible by the Argent development" but is disappointed that what is proposed is over-scaled, mediocre and "indistinguishable from large developments elsewhere". To be positive, it has produced a scheme for a new avenue stretching from the new forecourt to King's Cross to the Granary which cuts *through* Culross Buildings by two large arches – making a sort of gateway.

But what is really disturbing is that English Heritage is acquiescing in the demolition of both Culross Buildings and Stanley Buildings North, arguing that "community benefits" from the scheme would outweigh their loss and claiming that its own policy guidelines on the destruction of historic buildings have been satisfied.

EH's job is supposed to be to encourage the *protection* of historic buildings and the historic environment – it can leave promoting developments and idolising superstar architects to CABE. But I fear English Heritage is now so demoralised by the indifference to it displayed by the government and by successive financial cuts that it is terrified of being seen to stand in the way of development.

'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

WHITE CUBE GALLERY
GILBERT AND GEORGE
SONOFAGOD PICTURES: WAS JESUS HETEROSEXUAL?
It's not at all shocking.
They must be losing their touch.
Blasphemy!
Profaning the temple!
On thy bellies shalt thou crawl!

I-SPY Cheam Village

Submitted by Roger Whittaker. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

Art Attack

IF the recent history of devolution in Britain has proved one thing, it's that small-scale government spells havoc for the arts – as parallel events in Wales and Scotland through the past few weeks are proving. Painfully.

In the north, the Scottish Executive has decided to abandon the arm's-length principle of arts funding, announcing the peremptory disbandment of the Scottish Arts Council and informing the five major recipients of SAC money that in future they'll get their grants direct from government. Those five recipients include the already battered Scottish Opera, which has only just come through a long and tortuous renegotiation of its relationship with the SAC and could do without the upheaval of a sudden new bureaucracy to deal with. And although the executive is claiming that this brutal termination of the SAC is "popular", the truth is otherwise. Most of the Scottish arts companies await with fear and trembling the very real likelihood that party politics will now filter upfront into the funding process and that they face a future where artistic plans will only be passed if they meet non-artistic criteria.

When Welsh Assembly Culture Minister Alun Pugh called in Arts Council Wales (ACW) Chairman Geraint Talfan Davies for a meeting on the Friday before Christmas, it was to tell him that his days were numbered – and that Pugh's plans for the assembly to directly fund the six largest Welsh arts organisations (which account for 42 percent of the council's budget) were non-negotiable.

Opposition AMs were united in condemning the plans to directly fund Welsh National Opera, the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Clwyd Theatr Cymru, Theatr Genedlaethol Cymru, literary organisation Academi and dance troupe Diversions as "creeping politicisation" of the arts. It's already been made plain that the minister wants to focus on access to the arts for minority and disadvantaged groups. While it's a laudable aim, the ACW says it's already committed to widening participation and that losing the traditional arm's-length approach to arts funding puts freedom of expression at risk.

Mr Pugh cannot yet entirely do away with the ACW, which the Welsh Assembly has no independent power to dissolve, as it was set up under royal charter.

Council officials are now trying to convince the first minister, Rhodri Morgan, that his cultural henchman is exceeding his authority. But it looks as though the days of the council are numbered. And with Wales and Scotland out of the ring, there are some worried people at Arts Council England.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

Letters

Liberal interpretation

Sir,

Surely John Hemming – the Lib Dem MP whom you criticise (1150) for being a) drunk and b) the father of a child out of wedlock – is beginning to look a very conventional chap.

MICHAEL ALLEN,

Via email.

Lookalike

Skeleton

Campbell

Sir,

The recent heightened exposure, as it were, of the Lib Dems has reminded me of the close resemblance between Ming 'Menzies' Campbell and the jovial character who advertised Scotch videotape in the 1980s. It would be cruel to comment on the double irony of Lib Dems/ skeletons and the fact that the Scotch ad carried the slogan 're-record, not fade away' to the tune of 'Not Fade Away', so I shall refrain.

Yours,
JAMIE MILNE,

Via email.

The devil's work

Sir,

Thanks for the free publicity for the Scottish Executive's excellent new National Strategy for abuse survivors, for our publications and for Laurie Matthew's ace 18 And Under Project, which supports young people suffering sexual assaults of any kind (Satanic Panic, Eye 1150). By the way, Laurie's been a Dundee Citizen of the Year – sinister!

To critics without the honesty to sign their names:

The sweeping "Satanic Panic" which wildly enthused professionals is a fabrication, invented by abusers and spread by their apologists. No one who confronted evidence of unspeakable sadistic abuse believed its reality with anything but the most profound reluctance.

The Satanic Panic Conspiracy is the only known alliance in history of evangelical Christians, militant feminists, sectioned psychiatric patients, social work managers, psychodynamic psychotherapists and Highland police sergeants – all orchestrated from California by Prof. Roland Summit.

Get real!

The Satanic Abuse Witch-Hunt is the only witch-hunt in history where those supposedly leading it were its victims, and found their careers destroyed.

Who's been gullible in all this? Don't join them, Private Eye.

Conspiratorially,
SARAH NELSON,

Edinburgh.

Publisher be damned

Sir,

Your comments in Literary Review that Augusten Burroughs is attempting to "try something different" by writing the novel "Sellevision" fails to acknowledge that it was in fact his first book written six years ago. It seems possible that the only people attempting to try something different are the publishers, by offering an old, and in Burroughs' own opinion, average novel as new fodder.

One wonders what could possibly motivate them to pursue such a course of action?

Kind regards,
JANE MATHARU,

Via email.

Shopping Trolley

Sir,

No wonder NHS hospitals are showing such huge deficits if their administrators take the line shown in your "Off Your Trolley" cartoon, by rewarding staff who send patients home with an aspirin. Hospitals only generate cash from the system by keeping patients hanging around, so that they can claim from their funders, the Primary Care Trusts. The trick is to keep the suckers (sorry, patients) in some sort of treatment as long as you possibly can, to bump up the bills in the internal NHS economy. It's all smoke and mirrors, like the rest of NHS finance.

Yours ever,
ANON EXECUTIVE-DIRECTOR,

Via email.

Hold the back page

Sir,

I was gobsmacked to see the advert by Microsoft on the back page of issue 1150.

My understanding – correct me if I'm wrong – is that the main reason Microsoft's software is so open to attack is that they included a "back door" way in via the internet to enable them to check up on any given copy of the software running on an internet connected computer.

This feature, which appears to be for the benefit of Microsoft rather than the customer, has then been exploited ad nauseam by hackers.

In good old US of A fashion the belated attempts to patch over this weakness is then trumpeted as a strength...

TIM WARD,

Via email.

Lookalike

Schwarzenegger

Allen

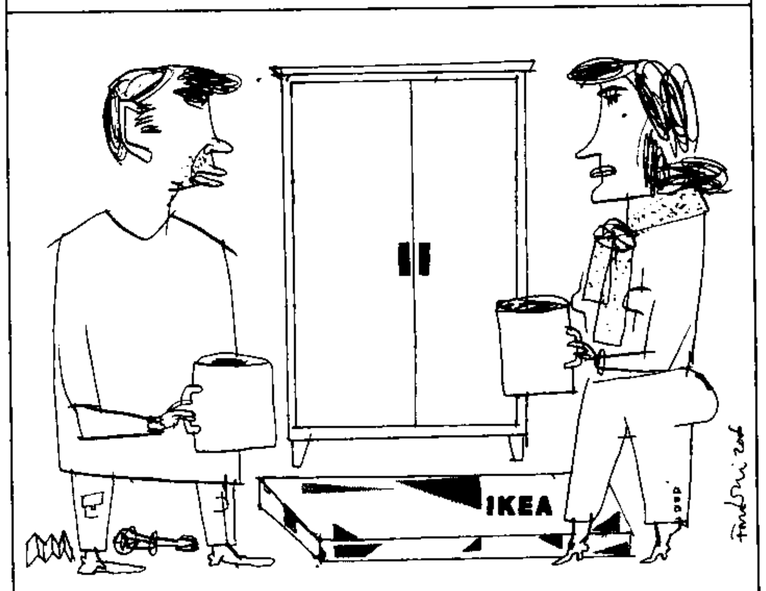
Sir,

The similarity between Arnold Schwarzenegger, governor of California, and Clarence Ray Allen, the late death row prisoner to whom he denied clemency on 13th January, cannot have escaped your notice.

Yours,
JEM SILVERSTONE,

Via email.

Scenes You Seldom See



"No missing pieces... the instructions were easy to understand... and putting it together took no time at all"

Doesn't ad up

Sir,

Dr B. Ching seems to be a little confused. TfL was not forced to take down its "faster, smarter, easier" Oyster card advertisements "on the grounds that the cards were none of these" (1150). It took down advertisements stating "blue is the new pink" because Oyster season tickets carried no restrictions, but Oyster pay-as-you-go could not be used on all National Rail routes in the London area and a one-day Travelcard could not be loaded on to an Oyster card. Never mind. Perhaps "careless is the new accurate".

Yours faithfully,
ANDY CHAPMAN,

Cranleigh.

"I'd like your permission to marry your son"

Patriot games

Sir,

Sorry, but anyone who reads Angharad Mair's column in "Wales On Sunday" (Media News, Eye 1150) knows that she would have said these things, even if she had no "attachment" to the producers of the programme "Caerdydd".

It's not about financial interest – it's about being pro-Welsh!

Yours sincerely,
WAYNE BEAVER,

Hirwaun.

CLAUDE MONET,, collection of 8 large framed pictures, suit Museum or Gallery, genuine, £100. Tel.

Evening Herald (Plymouth)

The Primary 3 pupil scooped a scary day out in Edinburgh, which included a visit to the Edinburgh Dungeon and a slap-up as her prize from the Anthony Nolan Trust.

Peeblesshire News

Number crunching

3% ■ Percentage of Radio 4's audience tuned in at 5.30am to hear UK Theme

3% ■ Percentage of that number who have complained about UK Theme being scrapped

Oil's well

Sir,

As a Shell valued employee on the LNG plant in Sakhalin (Eye 1149) I enjoyed reading out your correspondent's letter on the bus ride to work, especially the recycled nonsense about 50 grand in used fivers changing hands. Not that this will buy much on the island with all the other money pouring in. The gas revenues may be a few years off still, but where you do think the 20bn budget "blow out" is being spent? The government is no fool and strictly enforces its right of 70% Russian content. Granted the infrastructure needs serious attention, but full local employment and a construction boom is a very different picture from the post-Soviet wasteland of a few years ago.

Yours faithfully,
ANDREW PARSONS,

Via email.

Spaced

Sir,

Regarding Lookalikes (Pete Burns and The Wrath). I suspect that your staff are not regular viewers of the show nor visitors to www.gateworld.net, and are thus unaware that the vampiric villains of Stargate: Atlantis are in fact the "Wraith" and not the "Wrath" and, of course, tend to ravage people rather than planets. I await with bated breath future Stargate lookalikes featuring "Cool Warriors" and "Attack-Class" space vessels.

May your ZPM never be depleted.

Regards,
MARTIN HOWE,

Via email.

● You're right about the spelling. As for planets... tell that to the Satedans, whose planet is a smouldering wreck. Eye Sci-Fi Correspondent.

Spud he likes

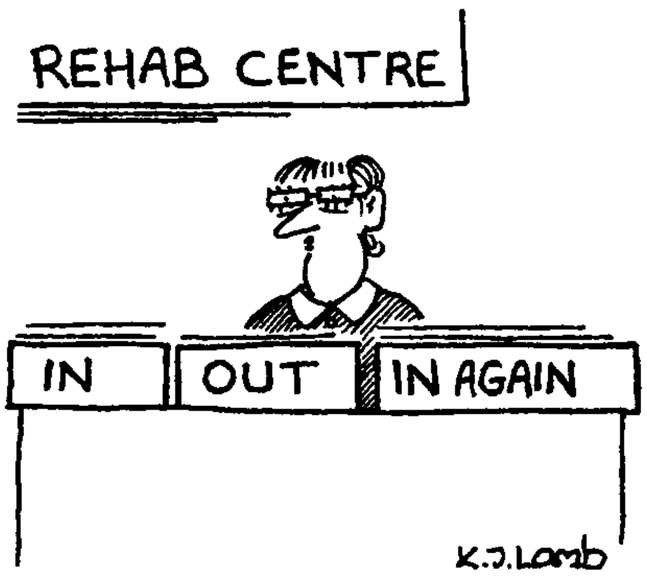
Sir,

Jeez – no wonder Jez passed out at the Islington Pastathon when eating gnocchi. No pasta this, you fools! It's POTATO based!!!

Gastronomically yours,
PETER SCATCHARD,

Wantage, Oxford.

● Knife & Packer write: Not so: it can also be semolina flour-based! The debate rages (and in the meantime, who is saving the narwhal!?!)



The yolk's on us

Sir,

Re: I-Spy 1150 ("We do not sell eggs etc").

It has become a somewhat tiresome tradition among the more "boisterous" members of the secondary school community to cover each other, and sometimes members of the public, with eggs and flour on the last day of term. I imagine the West Yorkshire police are reacting to complaints. Keep up the good work!

STEVE HARVEY
(secondary school teacher),

Via email.

Mistaken identity

Sir,

Mon Dieu, Hastings! Are your little grey cells wearing thin? You're definitely getting your Order of the Brown Nose mixed up with your Luvvies: the "David Suchet" mentioned on page 11 (1150) should, of course, be John Suchet, the newsreader. Some bungling amateur has made the schoolboy error of confusing him with his brother David, the actor currently packing 'em in at the National who is best known for his television portrayal of Hercule Poirot. But whodunnit? Could we have all the suspects assemble in the drawing room at etc, etc.

Yours faithfully,
DR GEORGE SIK,

Epsom, Surrey.

Lookalike

Sontaran

Ackroyd

Sir,

Peter Ackroyd, now presenting the Romantics BBC2 programme, seems to be a relative of the cloned warrior Sontarans, sworn enemies of Doctor Who. Does the D-G know about this?

Yours,
PETER FINDLEY,

Via email.

Complaining loudly

Sir,

Time to face the music about your malapropism in Street of Shame (Eye 1150). You write of rumours of Kennedy's drinking "reaching a crescendo when Newsnight's Jeremy Paxman brought the topic up during an interview in July 2002".

As Lunchtime O'Boulez would surely tell you, "crescendo" is the increase in volume itself, not the climax of that increase.

Yours banging on a drum – and gradually getting louder,

ANNA LOMAX,

Luton, Beds.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"She's definitely improved a lot, even compared to when she was at her best."
KIM CLIJSTERS, BBC website
(Mark Cooper)

"It's a lonely place out there in the middle of the table."
STEVE DAVIS, BBC Snooker
(Robin Roper)

"A home win could have been a milestone around our necks, but now we've put it to bed."
ALAN PARDEW, Radio 5 Live
(Ken Wilson)

"Joe Cole had a slash on the edge of the box and it actually found its way back to the corner flag."
COLIN COOPER, Radio 5 Live
(Ken Moxham)

"It's a misconception that girls get themselves pregnant to get a council home."
Contributor, Radio 5 Live
(Bruce Critchley)

SOLUTIONS

"Michelin Fleet Solutions" – *tyres*

"A1 Accommodation Solutions" – *holiday flats*

"Integrity Resource Solutions" – *recruitment*

"NHS Educational Solutions for Workforce Development" – *training*

"Signinfo: the Uk's leading provider of expense claim solutions" – *receipts*

"Candystripe Inc: Childcare Solutions for the Community" – *crèches*

All submitted by readers

Cascading...

Sir,

Further to Nick Hart's letter (Eye 1150), we at Mowlem (of Bath Spa and "Peckham Pulse" fame, and therefore perhaps aptly) are drowning under a cascade of memos from Planet Management.

Here are two examples:

"Since the previous Update we have... Cascaded the setting of objectives down to Business Unit level. These will continue to be cascaded down to all staff in the New Year."

"Team Briefings. Through a process of cascade briefing, your own Divisional, business unit or function heads will personally deliver a regular update on the situation, putting it into context for your particular business and answering any immediate questions you may have."

I could supply more than enough to render the Solutions column justly obsolete.

Yours,
JERRY BILT,

Mowlem.

Ruling class

Sir,

Is it really so dreadful that the Today programme's "Who Rules Britain?" poll should have received so many votes from UKIP members – as well as from a host of others (Eye 1150)?

You may as well say it's dreadful that an MP is elected "because, dash it, his **supporters** *voted for him!" clearly "distorting" the poll!*

Whose lame excuse for the result was it anyway? I'll bet it was Auntie's.

Yours faithfully,
PHILIP FOSTER,

Cambridge.

Photo Opportunity

Sir,

It is reported that the sexual frisson surrounding The Spectator has resulted in the formation of a lengthy queue to become the magazine's next editor. The magazine's chief executive is reported as saying that fifteen "serious candidates" are being whittled down to a shortlist of three or four.

Have your newshounds managed to obtain any photographs of the said chief executive interviewing one of these serious candidates?

Yours faithfully,
MICHAEL CLAYTON,

Wisbech, Cambs.

Letter from **Khartoum**

from Our Own Correspondent

OUT with the old, in with the new. Africa used to have appalling dictators, who would kill their people in large numbers and steal vast sums of their money. Remember Uganda's Idi Amin, Bokassa in the Central African Republic and Zaire's dear old Mobutu? Such tyrants would celebrate their tyranny in the annual farce known as the Organisation of African Unity summit.

But new Africa is different. Today we have a new generation of leaders, committed to reform. So instead of the hypocritical OAU, we have the, ahem, very different African Union (AU).

In just three years, we have benefited from countless resolutions outlawing coups, *condemning human* rights abuse and supporting the right of outside intervention when regimes murder civilians. So why has the AU chosen benighted Sudan to host this month's annual jamboree?

Nothing so fussy as an election brought our Islamist regime to power and the coup leaders of 1989 are second only to the Hutus of Rwanda in the genocide league. Even conservative UN reports reckon that 200,000 civilians have been killed by our army and allied militias groups in the western region of Darfur. After it seized power in 1989, our government stepped up a war in the south that cost more than a million lives.

Alas, the 40 sparkling presidential villas on the banks of the Blue Nile outside Khartoum, complete with cinema-sized TVs and the finest European linen and china, weren't enough to persuade the AU's VIPs to back our colonel-turned-president, Omer El Bashir, as its next chairman. The new face of Africa could not be represented by an ex-soldier with a coup, civil war and repression to his name. Instead they chose Denis Sassou-Nguesso of Congo.

How representative is he of the "new" Africa? Well, Sassou has the distinction of having shot his way to power not once, but twice: first in a coup in 1979 and then again eight years ago, following a civil war he started after his people threw him out in the only free elections the country ever had. Congo is not large, so casualties were just 10,000.

Sassou, a keen freemason, now combines the best of the old and new. The socialism has gone, but the champagne remains. With peace restored, there's no need to kill thousands. In fact families of the alleged victims say that no more than 350 refugees, apparently suspected of opposition sympathies, were tortured to death by the president's police chief. They succeeded in getting him arraigned before a French court, but proceedings were dropped after Sassou reassured Jacques Chirac the charges would be investigated back in Brazzaville.

The wheels of justice may grind slowly in war-ravaged Congo – but less so in Britain, where Denis Gokana, Sassou's special adviser and head of the national oil company, faced court allegations of setting up a host of front companies in exotic locations to hide payments that should have gone to the national treasury and Congo's long suffering creditors. The judge said Gokana's "statements contained falsehoods", that he "sought to evade the effects of the courts' orders", and that he had created a chain of "sham" trading companies through which Congo's oil was marketed. Gokana was not in court. Apparently he'd had to return home for a party.

The chef may be elected, but at the last poll he made sure all his opponents had been driven out of the country. And true, there is a cabinet; but astonished business visitors claim key decisions are more likely to be taken around the ing pong table, after ministers have carefully st. They also report the president's feverish gandan discussions with his wife's daughter m an earlier liaison. As we say in Africa: ngs are never so bad they cannot always get rse!

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "Had it not been for the terrible events of September 11, the police would not have seen this as such a terrible offence," defence counsel Helen Shilton told the Magistrates Court in Brisbane. "Of course, trying to open the emergency door of a plane at 39,000 feet is potentially dangerous, and my client's explanation that she was 'just stepping outside for a cigarette' might have seemed irresponsible to the air stewards. But when I tell you that she has a history of sleepwalking and was on medication at the time, you will appreciate that there is a perfectly rational explanation for her apparently bizarre behaviour."

Shilton was defending Sadrine Helene Sellies, a thirty-four-year-old French nurse who had tried to open an airliner's external door

during the Hong Kong to Brisbane leg of her flight. "This was her first trip abroad," Shilton continued, "and she was absolutely terrified of flying. So before leaving France, she obtained prescriptions for sedatives and sleeping pills, and swallowed several before take-off. While the plane was refuelling in Hong Kong, she drank several whiskies, took more sleeping pills, and then drank wine, not realising that the effect of the pills would be compounded by alcohol. She has absolutely no recollection of what happened next, but accepts that she must have entered a somnambulist state during the flight, picked up her lighter and cigarettes, and tried to open a door and step outside for a smoke, until she was wrestled to the ground by air stewards. She is extremely remorseful, but she didn't know what she is doing, and she is not a terrorist."

Commonwealth prosecutor Anthony Gett said passengers had seen her trying to open the emergency door, and Ms Sellies pleaded guilty to a charge of endangering an aircraft. After accepting her explanation, magistrate Gordon Dean released her on a $1,000 12-month good behaviour bond. *(The Australian, 22/11/05. Spotter: Mark Burgess)*

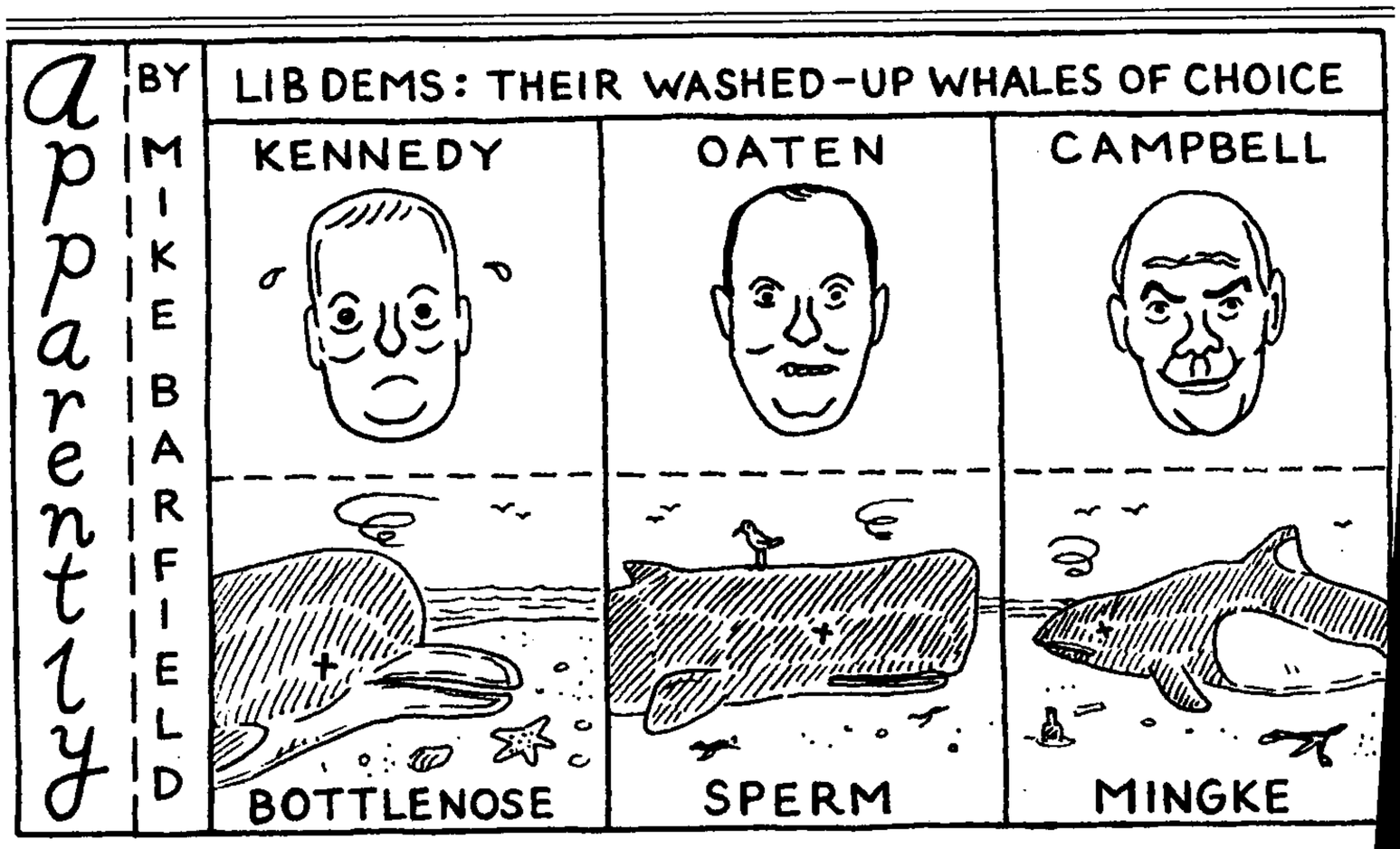
– ● –

● *Sir, On a holiday in Ireland, I booked a mystery coach tour. Once we were comfortably seated, the guide in charge suggested we all put £1 in the kitty, and the one who got closest to guessing our destination would be the winner. I came very close, but the driver won. Yours sincerely, C. Warner, Prestwich, Manchester.* (Saga magazine, November 2005. Spotter: Colin Rieley)

– ● –

● "This is a very serious matter," Maxime Arseneau of the Parti Quebecois told reporters outside the National Assembly, "because it is strictly illegal to sell yellow margarine in Quebec province. Inspectors from the Agriculture Department have already seized 72 plastic tubs of yellow Becel margarine from four Wal-Mart stores in outlying areas of the city, and we suspect that more contraband tubs were on sale in the city centre, but were withdrawn before we got there. We have fought for a decade to keep butter-yellow margarine out of Quebec, to protect our local dairy farmers, and we have no intention of lowering our guard now, by allowing this illegal substance to infiltrate our grocery stores. Lifting the ban is not going to happen. Period."

But John Coyne, the vice-president of Unilever Canada (who manufacture Becel) denied National Assembly allegations that his company was conspiring with Wal-Mart to smuggle yellow margarine into the province. "The situation is really weird," he said, "but we're not trying to do anything underhanded. We make a lot of yellow margarine, because it's perfectly legal to sell it everywhere in the world, except Quebec. We make a special pale blend for them, but from time to time the wrong kind of margarine might be shipped there by mistake. When that happens, we hope that people alert us so we can remove it from the stores. In recent years, Unilever have gone all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada to challenge Quebec's ban, but we lost, and we abide by that ruling. However, the Council of the Federation recently called on Quebec to drop its ban on yellow margarine, and threatened that Alberta and Saskatchewan might take retaliatory measures against Quebec if it does not comply. So we're quietly optimistic about the future for butter-yellow Becel." *(The Gazette [Montreal], 11/11/05. Spotter: Rodney Kennett)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo,

And I don't mind admitting that it's a bit lonely up here on the highwire!

Because, as I keep saying, that's where I am – walking a tightrope, with plenty of people down below, hoping that I'll fall off!

The Vicar on a highwire (Thanks to Mr de la N!)

It's at a time like this that you realise who your real friends are! And I can tell you that as of now it seems like I haven't got any!

As I look down from my high wire (no safety net – this is the real thing!) I can see all those people who I thought were my friends looking up and shouting, "go on vicar, fall off and break your neck!".

Not very nice, is it? And these are people who only got where they are today thanks to me!

OK, one expects the likes of Mr Marshall-Andrews to make trouble. Haven't we all of us *had to* put up with the spectacle of him sitting there on Sunday mornings at the back of the congregation, shouting 'looney' during my sermons!

It's no surprise that he can't see the point of my plans to turn our local primary school into a Wal-Mart Beacon of Excellence Starter Academy of Retail Technology and the Performing Arts!

But when I am being criticised by the likes of Mrs Estelle Morris, then, frankly, I feel like jumping down off my wire and strangling her with my bare hands! (I don't obviously, I'm only talking figuratively, in the Biblical sense, but I am sure you will all know what I mean!)

Has Mrs Morris forgotten how many times I had to step in to save her skin when she was the headmistress of the primary school?

Honestly, she makes Mrs Kelly look almost competent. (No offence, Ruth, just my little joke – we *all know* that it wasn't your *fault that* you appointed St Albion's best-known flasher to be the lollipop man – anyone could have made that mistake, except me, of course, which is why I'm the one who's up here on the high wire, while the rest of you are down there whingeing and trying to make me fall off!)

And who's that bald old man who is shouting up at me in Welsh? I am sure few people in the parish will remember him, but it was me who gave Mr Kinnock a helping hand when he was down and out, and found him a part-time job and accommodation in the Old People's Home?

Look, I'm not asking Neil for gratitude, but at least he could say 'thank you'!

Instead of which he's telling me that I'm wrong about everything (well, from your own past record, you'd certainly know all about that, wouldn't you? No offence, Neil, but you are in danger of becoming something of a whingeing Welsh windbag!).

And, as for the Judas of them all, what about Mr Alastair 'Iscariot' Campbell, the former editor of this newsletter!

Alastair might like to remember that when I dragged him out of the gutter he was no more than a foul-mouthed drunk who'd had a nervous breakdown! It was me who turned him into a foul-mouthed drunk who edited this newsletter!

What's more, we even gave a job to his partner Fiona, who used to run errands for Cherie and help with the typing!

It's a bit much to see those two getting on their high horse and telling me how to run the parish!

As it says in the Good Book; "with friends like those, who needs enemies, puh-leese?" (*Book of Ruth Kelly*, 17.4).

Look don't get me wrong. I've got nothing against people such as Alastair, Fiona, Neil and all the other traitors contributing to a free and open debate about things they know nothing about!

But let me tell you something. From where I'm standing, up here in the hot seat on the high wire, my best friend – and I know this is going to come as a shock to most of you – is that silly boy David Cameron, who's been going round the parish drinking tea and pretending to be the vicar!

Do you remember the story in the Bible about the very rich young man from Eton who asks Our Lord what he has to do to enter the 'kingdom of heaven'?

And Our Lord replied, "Give away all that you believe in and copy me". (You'll find it in the Sermon Given To Ferdinand Mount, as one of what we call 'the Pleatitudes', along with 'Blessed are the Warmakers' and all those other great sayings!).

Which brings me to my fifth and final point – i.e. what a nerve Mr Prescott of the Working Men's Club has got trying to tell me about education!

All I can say is that if I want advice about education, I'll ask someone who can read and write! (no offence, John, but it's not spelled with a 'sh' in the middle either!).

Yours (still up in the air!)

Tony

Parishioners Reunited

A column that keeps you posted on Albinonians, old and new!

Congratulations to Mr Birt who you remember used to sit in the attic in the vicarage looking out of the window at the blue skies and trying to think of something important.

At last John has found a job equal to his talents, advising businessmen how to ring up the vicarage and say "I'm a friend of John's".

If you have any Albinonian news, do write in! As Mr Birt always says, "Keep in touch, you know it makes money!".

Keep fit with Mrs Hewitt!

Hello everyone! Just to let you know that there is a new voluntary compulsory keep fit class!

Starting next month every single member of the parish will be given their own personal trainer and a check-up or MOT(!!) on their state of health. This is a wonderful opportunity to keep us all in tip-top condition as well as rooting out the scroungers, smokers, drinkers, fatsos and all the other deadwood that the rest of us are having to pay for!!

The Mobile Fitness Detector Van will be visiting your area soon. Pat Hewitt.

SQUATTERS

I have received a number of complaints about the unemployed disabled man who is currently squatting in Grace and Favour House behind the vicarage.

Surely our message should be one of compassion and tolerance for poor Mr Blunkett who, through entirely his own fault, finds himself in this very cushy number. T.B.

CONGRATULATIONS

To Mr and Mrs Brown on their forthcoming happy event (no, Gordon – you'll have to wait more than 9 months for that one!). It's just a shame that Gordon feels he has to copy the vicar's idea about having children later in life – particularily when you are not as fit as the vicar. To be frank, you might have better things to do with your evenings such as try and balance the books which are in such a terrible mess! No offence!

And talking of pale imitations I could not help noticing this picture of Gordon copying my tea idea in the hope of making people think he is the vicar. Nice try Gordon – but here's a PG-Tip! Why not try and balance the parish accounts instead. T

KNACKER HITS OUT AT RACIST COVERAGE

by Our Media Staff **Stephen Glovepuppet**

AN ANGRY Inspector "Knacker of the Yard" Blair hit out today at what he described as the "racist bias" in the coverage of police activities.

"Is it not significant," he asked, "that massive publicity is given to myself with my picture all over the papers and hundreds of articles appearing saying that I am useless and should resign?

"Compare this," continued Knacker, "with the coverage of black policemen. You don't read about their failings, do you?"

He then singled out the case of PC Token, who had admitted to a parking offence in a railway station carpark and had been fined £25 for failure to display a valid ticket.

Asked Sir Ian: "Why was this offence not given equal coverage to the minor shooting of an obscure Brazilian electrician who was understandably mistaken for Osama bin Laden?

Blackwash

"This is straightforward institutional racism," he concluded, "and the reporters responsible should be shot."

Inspector Knacker later apologised to the family of PC Token for what he called "the insensitive coverage of my earlier remarks by the media".

He said: "My heart goes out to the grieving parents of PC Token as they struggle to come to terms with his parking fine."

THAT MENEZES POLICE INQUIRY IN FULL

1. No officers were present at the scene of the shooting.

2. They were all somewhere completely different.

3. The gun went off by itself.

4. All the witnesses who claim they saw the officer shooting the suspect with the gun have now changed their story following their rendition to Guantanamo Bay for a sightseeing tour.

5. It was all a long time ago and nothing is gained by undermining confidence in the police at this late stage.

6. Er... that's it.

Those Palestinian Election Results In Full

Gaza, West

Shufti al Kruk *(The Fatah Catah Party)* 2,742; **Khillal Juze** *(Hamasmurder Party)* 47,302; **Mr George Galloway** *(Pro-Saddam Anti-Jodie-Marsh Alliance)* 0. Hamas elected. Galloway voted out.

West Bank (East)

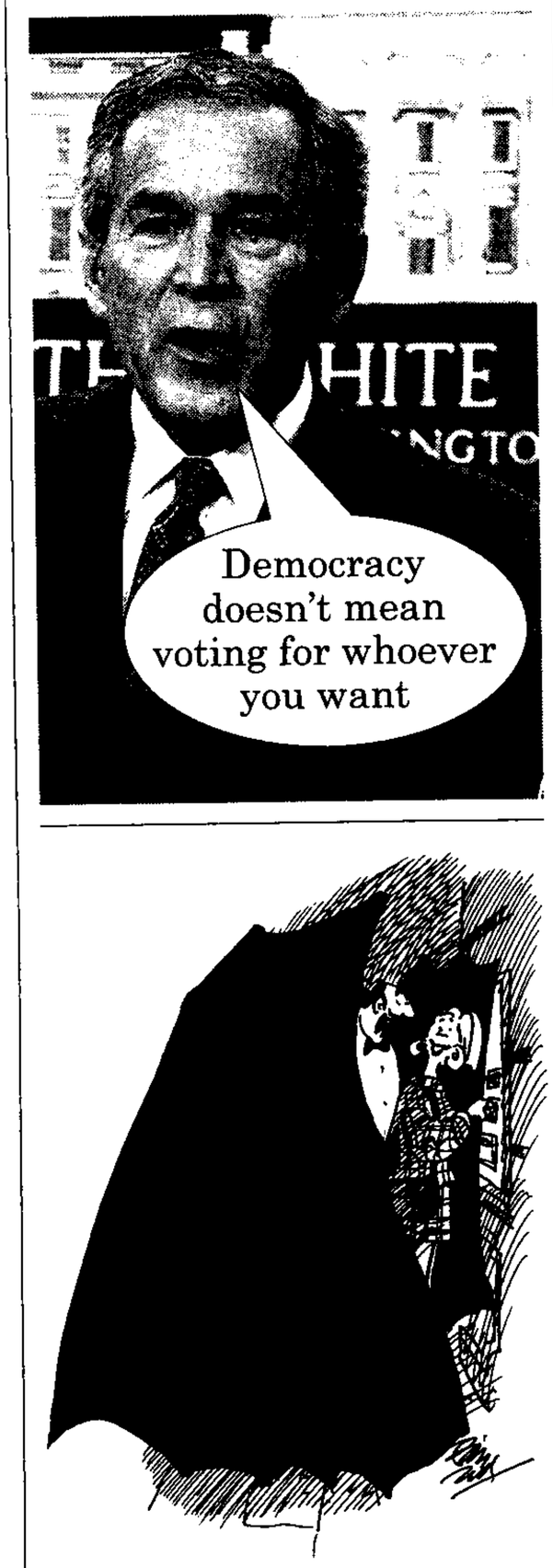
Mustafa Bakhanda *(Fatah Cheque-in-Bank)* 1,302; **Mahmoud al assassin** *(Hamasgrave)* 7,402; **Ali Shirt Liftah** *(Liberal Democrat)* 0. No change as Hamas candidate "taken out" by Mossad. Lib Dem stoned to death.

Those Canadian Election Results In Full

Moosejaw (South)

Z-z-z-z-z-z-z-z-z-z-z-z

PALESTINIAN ELECTION SHOCK



"Excuse me, my dear, may I shield your pin number from passing louts?"

The BBC Presents

ROME

An extraordinary tale of power, lust and depravity, set at the turn of the 21st Century.

(Tousle-haired Roman patrician in Old Etonian toga sits at his desk, working on his important speech to the Senate)

Boris Absurdicus *(for it is he)*: Blimeus! Cripus! This jolly old Roman Empire works pretty damn well, eh? Much better than the EU, whatever that is going to be!! And Cameronius – what a spliffing chap he is! We were at collegium together! Floreat myself what!

(Enter gorgeous, pouting, aristocratic Roman lovely)

Boris: Ave Petronella! You must be a vestal virgin.

Petronella: And you must be joking!

(Ends)

Cast In Full

BORIS ABSURDICUS.....Frankie Howerd
PETRONELLA WYATTUS.....Barbara Windsor
CAMERONIUS MAXIMUS.....Jim Dale
RODUS LIDDLUS.....Charles Hawtree

Lines on the Occasion of Her Majesty's 80th Birthday by The Poet Laureate **Rolf Harris** *(surely 'Sir Andrew Motion'? Ed)*

The Golden Rule Britannia

Everything changes all the time,
The sea, the sky, the seasons.
That sort of thing.

But one thing never changes, Ma'am.
The golden rule of thumb is constant –
My poetry remains forever terrible.
(Will this do?)

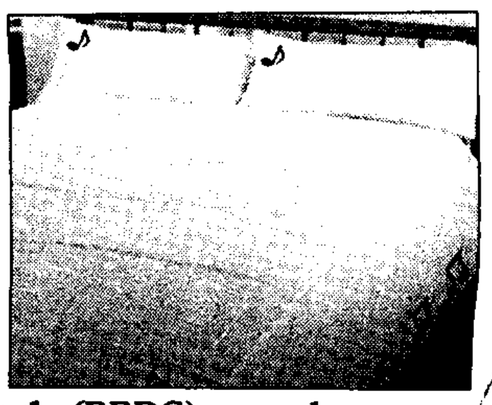
© Andrew Goingthroughthemotions 2006.

This poem will be set to music by Sir Rolf Harrison Birtwistle and sung in St George Best's Chapel, Windsor by the Arctic Monkeys. The single will be released and will immediately sell 365 million copies.

Advertisement

GNOME SPECIAL OFFER

TO celebrate the genius of Mozart on the 250th anniversary of his birth *(or death – subs, please check)*, Lord Gnome is proud to offer the readers of Private Eye the **MOZART DUVET COVER**



This very beautiful drip-dry Gnomelene duvet cover, bearing an exact facsimile of the type of notes Mozart would have used in one of his famous pieces of music, is guaranteed to keep "fans" "cosi" for "tutti" the night long!!

● *Designed by the world's leading duvet cover artist,* **Arvo Toggle** (RBDG), *your duvet cover will be a treasured heirloom for years to come!!*

Send now to: Gnome Mozart Offer, c/o The World of Duvets, The Trading Estate, Solihull.

'YES, I'M LIB DEM' Admits Gay MP

by Our Westminster Staff **Lunchtime O'Boys**

IN A sensational disclosure last night, a well-known homosexual member of Parliament was forced to admit to a tabloid newspaper that for years he had been an active Liberal Democrat.

Said the MP, "I have always believed that my political life is my own affair, and that the press has no right to know what I do in public."

After years of denying that he was a Lib Dem, the MP had been confronted by the Sun's political correspondent, Trevor Git, with photographic evidence obtained at a conference in Llandudno, showing him openly consorting with known Lib Dems, such as Mark Oaten and Simon Hughes.

Oaten Beam

He was also secretly tape-recorded using his mobile phone to contact Lib Dem voters, inviting them to "come out" and join him in what the newspaper described as "third-party activities too unpleasant to mention in a respectable newspaper".

LIB DEM IN THREE-IN-A-PARTY SHOCK

by Our Political Staff **Phil Bottom**

A SENIOR MP confessed last night that he had indulged in a threesome with fellow Liberal Democrats.

"Yes, it's true," he said. "There are only three members of the party left since everyone else has resigned in disgrace."

He admitted that the three of them had indulged in "humiliating practices" such as discussing Liberal policy on taxation, and had lived out their "perverse fantasies" of forming a government.

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

Letters *to the Editor*

SIR – Like many of your readers, I was shocked and appalled by the story of Mr Mark Oaten and the rent-boys. How the standards of public life have fallen! In my day, a rent-boy could be relied upon to maintain a discreet silence regarding the identity and predilections of their clients, particularly where three-in-a-bed romps are concerned. Things have come to a pretty pass when a man cannot even indulge in an afternoon of innocent homosexual dalliance, without the news reaching his wife and children courtesy of the popular press.
Sir Hugo Gaytrouser,
The Athenaeum.

SIR – Like many of your readers, I was shocked and appalled by the government's plan to legalise the running of so-called 'mini brothels'; where a maximum of two 'sex workers' may be permitted to practise their trade without interference. How the standards of public life have fallen! In my day, a brothel was a large and well-appointed establishment, efficiently run by a well-qualified 'madame', offering a wide range of agreeable young ladies who could provide an extensive choice of personal services. To think that the once distinguished term 'brothel' can now be demeaningly applied to some dingy Soho bedroom, where two dismal East European drug-addicts can fuel their habit by offering me 'executive relief' at an exorbitant fee of £90 (including VAT) is little short of scandalous.

No wonder we are the laughing stock of Europe!
Obadiah Rees-Beeswax Q.C.,
Lincoln's Inn.

Long Tradition Of Sodomy In Gladstone's Liberal Party

by Sir Anthony Howard

THE CURRENT spate of revelations concerning the sexual proclivities of leading members of the Liberal Party will come as no surprise to those of us whose political memories stretch back further than the most recent episode of Big Brother.

Setting aside for a moment the continuing historical speculation over the private life of the Earl of Rosebery, we have only to think of the example set by the most famous leader of the party in recent times, Sir Jeremy Fisher.

It is now 25 years since the newspaper-reading public were entertained by bizarre revelations concerning Sir Jeremy's relations with a large fish while dressed in a seedy rubber macintosh and galoshes *(Is this right? Wasn't there something about a dog? Ed.)*

FOCUS

Lemsip The Kingmaker Backs Thorpe

by Alan Watneys

MR OPEC LEMSIP, 22, the distinguished Lib Dem backbencher and husband of famous TV weather girl Myfanwy Isobar, has revealed that he is now backing 87-year-old Jeremy Thorpe for the leadership of the party.

Previously, Mr Lemsip had pledged "101 percent support" for Mr Charles Glenmorangie, switching subsequently in quick succession to Mr Mark Outed, Mr Simon Oohs and Mr Ming Vase, the Sino-Scottish newsagent. But, following the withdrawal of all the candidates, Mr Lemsip has announced that he is calling for the return of the party's former leader Jeremy Thorpe.

"What the party now needs above all," he said, "is someone who has no skeletons in his closet, and isn't going to be revealed doing something embarrassing, such as attempting to murder a gay lover on Exmoor.

"Jeremy is the man for the job. He is what I call a safe pair of trousers."

Lemsip Opec is 15.

Liberals traditionally have a beard

A Doctor Writes

Should they be allowed to die without any dignity?

IS IT fair that we as a mature sophisticated nation allow the Liberal Democratic Party to kill themselves in a painful, protracted and humiliating way?

Surely we should permit this elderly and weak party to terminate themselves in private with some modicum of *(cont. p94)*

A Yellow Taxi Driver writes

Every week a well-known yellow cabbie is invited to give his views on an issue of topical importance.

THIS WEEK: **Simon Hughes MP**, Cab No. 737428, on Homosexuality.

Blimey, those poofs, eh, guv? What a disgrace! That Peter Tatchell, he should be strung up! It's the only language he understands. You wanna go STRAIGHT there, guv? I'm your man. No cruising around Old Compton Street with me, mate. Where was I? Oh, yes, poofs – well, fair enough, live and let live, none of our business what they get up to, is it? Not that I'd know of course. Blimey, who's that coming up my exhaust pipe? No, thanks, mate! Anyway, where was I? Oh yes, poofs – what's the problem? I drive on both sides of the road, who doesn't? Fancy going to Old Compton Street? Suit yourself, luv. I had that Peter Tatchell in the back of the cab – what a sweetie! Excuse me, I've just gotta do a huge u-turn.

© A yellow cabbie.

" 'Tobacco'? Very nice, señor. But you are not allowed to do this inside, you say?"

'THESE MEN ARE NO DANGER' Says Ruth Kelly

by Our Education Staff **P.D. O'Phile**

The Education Secretary was put on the spot yesterday by claims that there could be as many as a hundred men working in the Labour Party who have a history of rebelling against the government.

Despite the fact that these men are on a register in the Whips Office (the so-called "List 94"), they have been allowed to carry on their normal duties in the House of Commons.

"Yes, there are a few rebels in the system," said a clearly embarrassed Mrs Kelly, "but I have run rigorous checks on them and I am satisfied that although they have rebelled in the past, there is no evidence to suggest that they will offend again."

However, when pressed about the exact numbers involved, Mrs Kelly tried to avoid answering the question and merely replied, "There will be a full inquiry into how these men have ended up in a position of power over children, which will be delivered to the new Education Secretary when I have lost the vote and resigned."

Last Will And Testament

SIR EDWARD HEATH

I, Sir Edward Aloysius 'Grocer'Heath, being of sound mind, do hereby bequeath the following items as set out below:

To Mrs H. Prunehat, in thanks for 40 years' faithful service as housekeeper, the sum of £9.99.

To Mr P. Barnfather, in thanks for 25 years' faithful service as my chauffeur and handyman, the sum of £5.35.

The remainder of my estate (£5 million) will be devoted to the setting up, in my former very fine and much admired home at 1, The Close, Salisbury, of the 'Sir Edward Heath Memorial Museum and Centre for Edward Heath Studies'. This will contain the following exhibits, to be displayed in perpetuity for the edification of future generations of students from all over the world, viz:

1 conductor's baton, as used by myself when conducting the Peking Democratic People's Orchestra in a performance of "*The Hullo Sailor's Hornpipe*" (arr. Heath) in 1979.

1 photograph in silver frame, showing myself standing next to the Rev. Sun Moon Loon, with 30,000 happy Korean newly-weds in the background.

1 very rare unsigned copy of my best-selling book "*Sailing*".

1 souvenir "Voodoo" doll, showing the late prime minister, Mrs Margaret Thatcher, with a number of coloured pins inserted into particularly painful points of her anatomy – a gift from the late President "Papa Doc" Duvalier of Haiti.

Also to be made available to serious scholars, a unique collection of 3 million documents and letters relating to my finest achievement, ie, the negotiation of the historic European Single Fish Treaty of 1972.

FORMER LEADER SPEAKS OUT

Little Zak Horner
Sat in the corner,
Eating his Christmas pie.
When told not to eat
And go back to his seat,
He told teacher to fuck off
and die.

The Alternative Rocky Horror Service Book

No. 94 A Service for Easter Day

President: Brothers and sisters, we are gathered together here today or, rather, most of us are, except the Bishop obviously, who is very busy on his cruise around the Mediterranean.

All: Bastard!

President: Thanks be to Swan Hellenic.

All: Not!

Hymn

(There shall then be sung a traditional hymn, "For Those We Hope Are In Peril On The Sea")

Reading

(There shall then follow a reading from the Old Testament)

"And Jonah was enjoying his freebie cruise, stopping off at Joppa and Tarshish and spent his time eating at the Captain's table, giving the odd lecture and catching the International Cabaret featuring the Sodom and Gomorrah Dancers. However, a great storm arose making Jonah and his wife feel really sea-sick for days because God was clearly pretty angry that Jonah wasn't getting on with his job as Bishop of Nineveh. And then guess what? He sent a huge whale to swallow Jonah up, which served him jolly well right."

President: This is the word of the Lord.

All: Are you listening, Beardy?

The Sermon

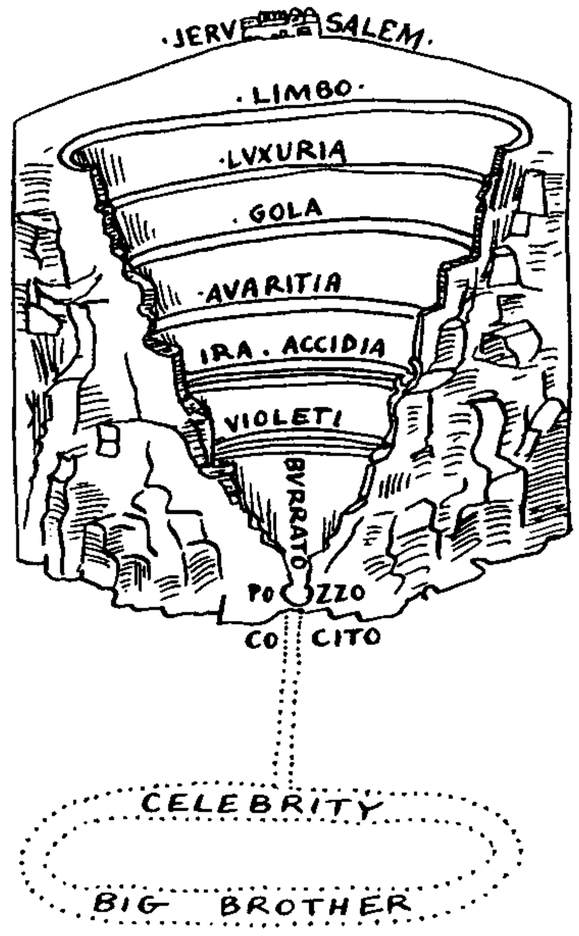
(There shall follow a short address, not by the Bishop, obviously, on the theme "Omnipresence: Why only God can be in two places at once")

The Dismissal

President: The Bishop should be dismissed.

All: Dismissing is too good for him.

(The congregation shall then process out to the accompaniment of Sir Clifford Richard's anthem "We're Not Going On An Easter Holiday")



"Sorry, Signor Dante, we've had to add another circle..."

Who Should Succeed Sven In The England Hot Seat?

● ***You decide who should be the new football manager to take our boys to World Cup glory***

1. **Lord Sir Sebastian Coe**
2. **George Galloway**
3. **Stephen Fry**
4. **Mark Oaten**
5. **Ulrika Jonsson**
6. **Freddie Flintoff**
7. **Radio 4's Mark Damazer**
8. **The Late Wilma the Whale**
9. **The Bishop of London** *(holidays permitting)*
10. **Ricky Gervais**
11. **Chantelle**
12. **Sir Peregrine Worsthorne**

(That's enough successors. Ed.)

THAT GOOGLE SEARCH IN FULL

Google 网页 图片 资讯 论坛 网页目录 更多»

conscience Search

⦿搜索所有网页 ○搜索所有中文网页 ○搜索简体中文网页

Web

Your search - **conscience** - did not match any documents.

Suggestions:

- Make sure all words are spelled correctly.
- Try different keywords.
- Try more general keywords.
- Make more money.

the PREMIERSH*TS

OLD SWEDISH PROVERBS 94

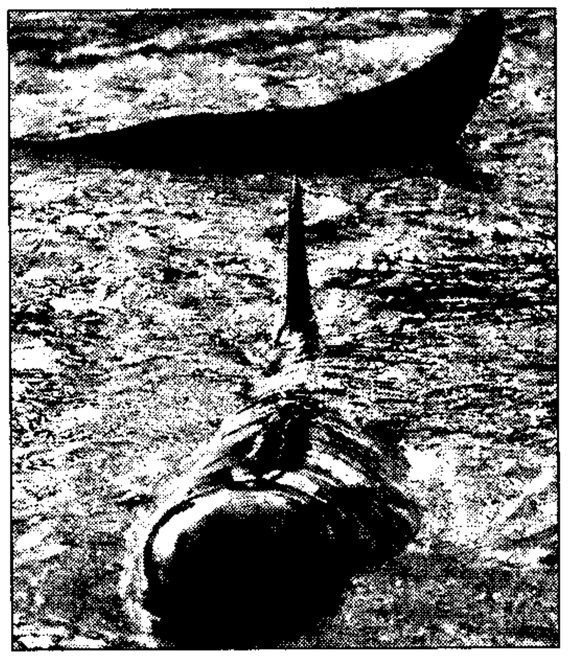
This is the way
The World Cup ends,
Not with a bung
But a whimper

Taken from The Hollow Men by Sven-Goran Eliotsson

DI-LY EXPRESS

THE WORLD'S GREATEST NEWSPAPER AND PROUD OF IT FRIDAY FEBRUARY 3, 2006

WHO KILLED THE PRINCESS OF WHALES?



As told by **Mohamed Ahab Fayed** to
Express Staff **Moby Dickhead**

AS MILLIONS queued to pay their last respects to the late Wilma, Princess of Whales, London's historic river Thames yesterday became a sea of flowers.

But one questions remains unanswered: Was the whale murdered?

There is good evidence to suggest that the tragic death of the whale was no accident.

The white Fiat Uno which was seen fleeing from the scene of the crime was almost certainly being driven by none other than Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, senior intelligence sources last night confirmed to the Daily Express.

Claims by the authorities that the whale had been "drinking heavily" before she and her friends left the North Sea have been dismissed as "complete fuggin' rubbish".

Former police chief Lord Stevens has been asked to carry out a series of extensive foreign holidays *(Surely "thorough investigations"? Ed.)*.

- **Where Were You When You Heard The News That The Whale Had Died?** 7
- **Sign the Harrods 'Whale Condolence Book' in the famous Food Hall** 10
- **Whale Memorial Fountain – Will It Be Safe For Kiddies? asks Max Hastings** 12

PLUS **FREE Whale DVD given away with every issue!!**

THOSE GAY COWBOY FILMS IN FULL

★ Dances With Wooves

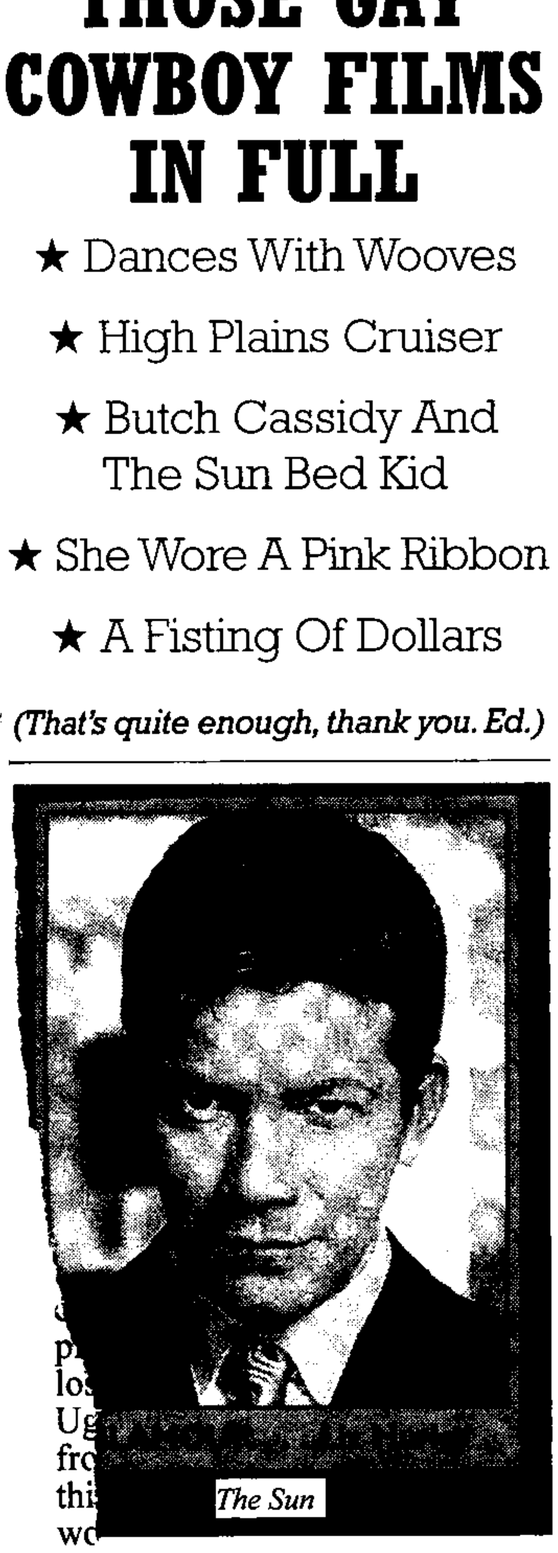
★ High Plains Cruiser

★ Butch Cassidy And The Sun Bed Kid

★ She Wore A Pink Ribbon

★ A Fisting Of Dollars

(That's quite enough, thank you. Ed.)



"My God, Fothergill – they're not King or Emperor – they're Führer Penguins!"

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Radio Four's 'UK Theme Tune'

So. Farewell
Then the UK
Theme by the late
Fritz Spiegl.

All over the country,
For 30 years, listeners
To Radio Four
Have woken up to
This medley
Of British folk tunes.

Normally I would give
My readers an
Impression of
How it goes
(See my many tributes to
The Magnificent Seven).

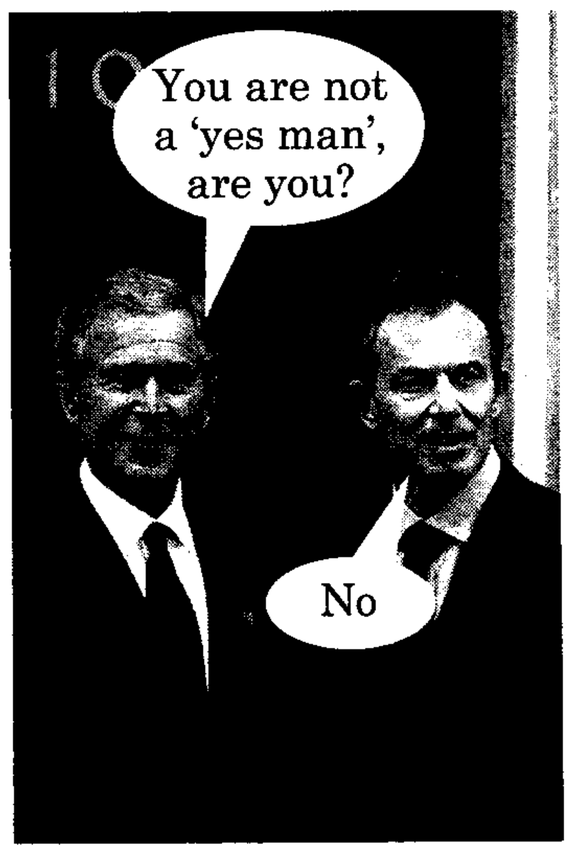
However, I do not know
How it goes, since
I do not get up
At 5.30
In the
Morning.

U.K. Thribb (17½), winner of the Whitbread Poetry Prize for his translation into verse of the epic 3-volume biography of the French painter Henri Mattress by Edmund Hillary.

BROWN BACKS UK THEME

THE Chancellor Gordon Brown today defended retaining the the UK theme as vital to his leadership ambitions.

"I don't care what David Cameron says, I'm going to keep calling for a British day," said the Chancellor *(cont. p. 94)*



POLICE LOG

Neasden Central Police Station

Office hours: 9-12 Mon-Tues (except Tuesday)

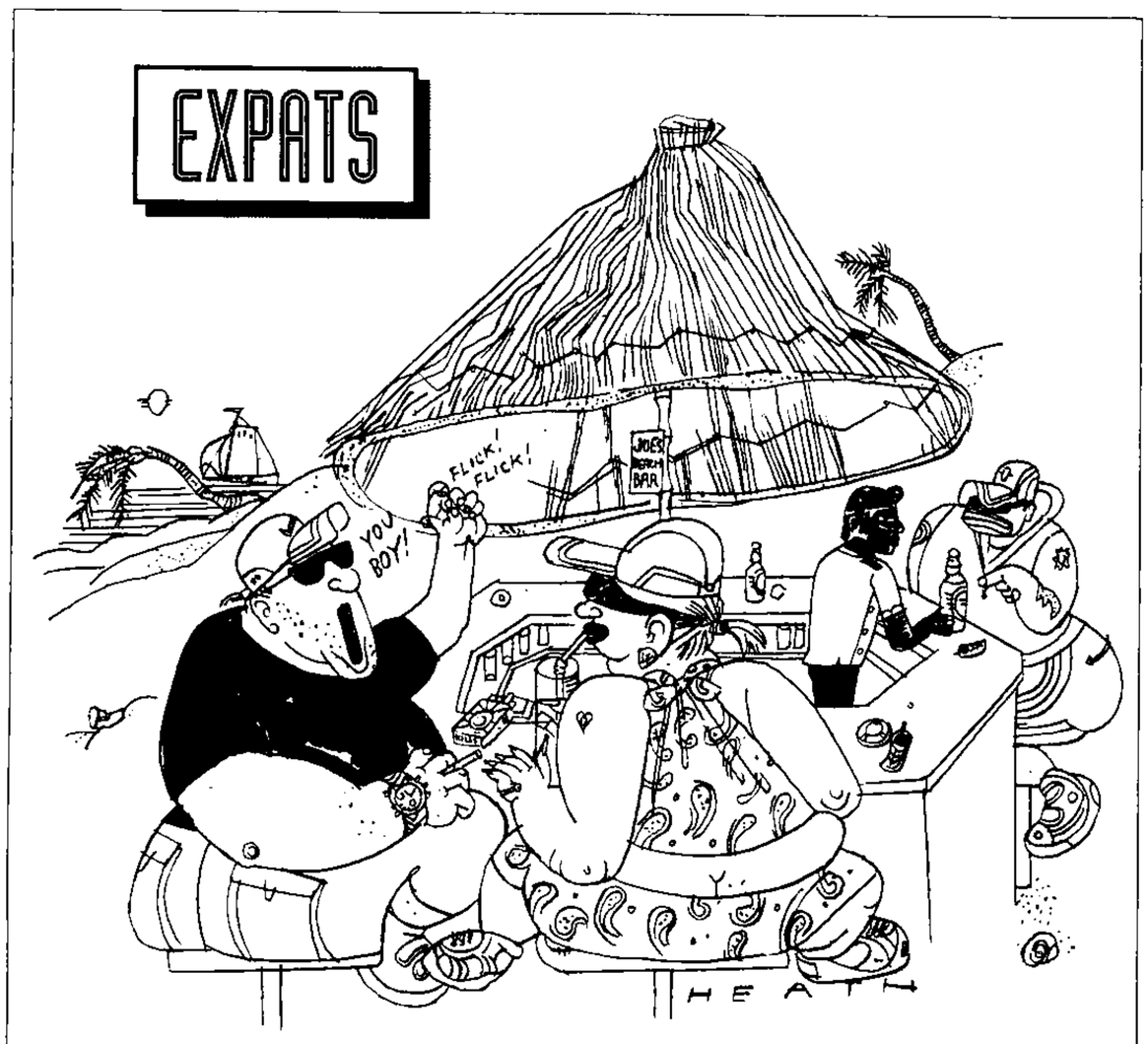
30 January 2006

1100 hrs All officers reported to canteen for debriefing on 'Operation Gorilla', to apprehend the fur coat allegedly worn by celebrity transsexual Miss Peter Burns. Several officers had been deployed to keep a close watch on the station television screen to ensure that the aforesaid garment, manufactured in breach of the Import of Endangered Primates Directive, 2003/64/EC, did not leave the premises of the so-called 'Big Brother House'. When these officers suspected that a serious crime had been committed, reinforcements were called in at 2.49 a.m. and 25 officers (including 8 WPCs and the Firearms Unit) were despatched to apprehend the coat and charge Ms Burns with first-degree murder of an unknown creature of simian orientation. Sadly the officers were denied access by a security guard, in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998, and were forced to regroup in the adjoining Star of Saddam oriental restaurant across the road. While continuing their surveillance, they consumed the following items: 32 plates of prawn vindaloo with rice and chips and 72 pints of King Cobra lager (except for PC Onanugu, our designated driver).

1233 hrs An emergency response team was summoned to attend a serious mushroom-picking incident at the Neasden Recreation Ground. A white female of middle-age, later identified as Mrs Ludmilla Fearnley-Whittingstall, had been spotted by Community Support Officer Blears engaged in the act of the illegal removal of fungoid substances from a grass verge adjacent to the paddling pool, in direct contravention of Section 81 of the Indigenous Mushroom, Puffball and Other Fungi (Protection) Regulations 2003. An armed response unit, including bomb disposal experts and a trained interpreter, WPC Alibhai-Brown, was sent to arrest and/or terminate the suspect, by lethal force if necessary. Mrs Fearnley-Whittingstall offered no resistance, but unfortunately a number of toddlers in the pool were caught in the cross-fire.

1555 hrs A complaint was received from a member of the public concerning a serious incident of racism committed by Ms Claire Squeakey, presenter of the 'Neasden Drive Time Show', who was alleged to have said 'Funny lot, the Welsh'. Ten officers from the Anti-Racism and Xenophobia Unit attended the offices of Radio Neasden FM and stormed Studio 1B, using stun grenades, water cannon and sniffer dogs. It transpired that Ms Squeaky was no longer on the premises because she had "gone to her Pilates class". The officers then interrogated the studio manager, Mr Terry Barcode, who under intensive questioning admitted to having been responsible for the death of the late Diana, Princess of Wales. He was let off with a caution and was admitted to hospital with severe internal injuries.

2215 hrs Message received regarding the outbreak of gang warfare on Mary Seacoal Street (formerly Florence Nightingale Avenue) outside the police station involving some 30 Somali and other East African youths engaged in a 'turf battle' over the right to sell crack cocaine in the vicinity of the bus shelter. The caller was invited, to ring back after 9 a.m. the following morning by means of a recorded announcement, which also advised the caller that any further attempts to contact the station would result in a prosecution for the wasting of police time.



"No, I wouldn't go back to Britain now. You get no respect"

GALLOWAY DEFENDS 'TIME IN HOUSE'

by Our Westminster Correspondent **Davina McCallmaxclifford**

GEORGE GALLOWAY has refused to apologise to his constituents, after pictures of him impersonating a lap-dog were published from his visit to Big Brother Uday's house in Baghdad in 1999.

"I had to perform a number of embarrassing tasks while in Uday's house – impersonating a lap-dog was just one of them, and I did it with gusto," insisted the Respect party MP.

"Spending time in Uday Hussein's house allowed me to get my message across that I was an apologist for Saddam to a much wider segment of the Iraqi people and *(cont. p. 94)*

The first three correct solutions opened will recieve the **New Penguin English Dictionary** (worth £15.99), designed for anyone who revels in the English language.

Observer

DIARY

NAOMI WOLF: THE SHITHOUSE

My life was at a crossroads. A crossroads, as I would painstakingly explain to my students, is an intersection of two or more roads. They were indeed grateful to me for this wisdom.

But, for me – a high-achieving woman who had reached the age of 40 but looked so much younger – a crossroads was also much more than that. On a profoundly symbolic level, it had come to represent time for a change in personal direction.

Yes, I may have been the high-profile leading philosopher of the feminist movement in the US, whom producers and editors begged 24/7 to appear on the leading television programs and to write in all the leading newspapers. This in itself was humbling.

People told me I was beautiful, with lovely big hair – the loveliest and the biggest hair, many would argue, of all the current feminist thinkers. This was even more humbling.

My highly-regarded books were international best-sellers, bought by women all over this huge, spherical world of ours. All these major achievements combined to make me arguably the humblest woman on this planet – this planet that I had for so long felt duty-bound to share with so many other, less advantaged souls.

But still there was something missing. I had somehow lost contact with part of myself. And that missing part was, I now realise, a sense of my own true worth.

How to recapture that pride? I remembered something my father Leonard – poet and teacher – had told me, when I was in my twenties, and unwilling to listen.

"A button, Naomi, is a button," he said, "But to find its place in this world, no button may exist alone. It must be sewn onto a coat."

At the time, I was unable to comprehend the inner beauty of this remark. But now, at my very own crossroads, I determined to venture up the steep, winding road to my father's house, and ask him to reveal its deeper wisdom to me.

I found him in the garden. He was wearing his red flannel basque shepherd's shirt, pouring himself a cup of yerba mate, an Argentine tea that you must press with a flattened silver spoon and sip through a fired-clay utensil, while reciting The Rubaiyat of Omar Khyam to a passing sparrow.

"Tell me, daddy – what is a button?" I said. Tears – tears of humility – were springing to my eyes, like the fountains in the Luxembourg gardens, so well known to French thinker Marcel Proust.

"A button, my dear," replied Leonard, "A button is a small disc or knob sewn on to a garment, either to fasten the aforesaid garment, or as an ornament or badge."

"Thank you, daddy" I said, thoughtfully. At that point, he looked deep into my heart. Perhaps he sensed I felt he was keeping something back from me.

"But," he added, the yerba mate suffusing his soft, bushy beard, "if the button has no buttonhole, then the garment can never be fastened."

I stared back at him in wonderment. For forty years of my life, I had felt a bit chilly.

And now, at last, I knew the reason why.

And I felt deeply humbled.

I had a lovely home, and a beautiful family. My books had earned universal praise. But I felt spiritually depleted. There was still something missing. Suddenly, I knew what it was.

"Daddy," I said, my soft azure eyes burning brightly. "Together, you and I – together we must build ourselves a shithouse."

Be still and listen. Leonard believes that there is always guidance from an inward voice and illumination from an inward light. Leonard thought long and hard. Stains – mauve, green, the lightest of yellows – of yerba mate began to appear on his trousers.

Then he spoke, wisdom distilled from eight decades. "A shithouse," he said, "is an outdoor lavatory, an out-house containing a large receptacle for the purpose of defecation. But, more than that, it is a sanctuary, also, for the process of urination." A tear entered his eye. It was a tear of hope.

"Together, Naomi," he said. "You and I shall build that shithouse."

The snow lay deep in the valley as we approached the village hardware store. "The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins teaches us that snow is never just snow," said Leonard. "Far from it. In a deeper, more profound sense, snow is atmospheric water vapour frozen into ice crystals and falling to earth in light white flakes."

In the store, Leonard bought us some wood, a hammer, a ladder and some nails. Like all the great teachers, he took care to explain in meticulous detail to the man behind the counter what each of those implements was. "A ladder," he said, "is for climbing up. But in the hurly-burly of modern life, young people sometimes forget that it is also useful for climbing down."

By the time we had finished our transaction, the man behind the counter was packing his bags. It turned out that over the course of his conversation with Leonard, he had decided to emigrate straightaway to New Zealand. He never left an address, or Leonard could have written him all about hammers, too.

I held the hammer in my left hand, and hit it over and over again with the nail.

"There is a better way" observed my father.

Being an unskilled learner was humbling. But if women are to advance, we must all learn to build shithouses with our fathers.

As we constructed our shithouse, I value the hard-won wisdom of my father. "For safety and comfort, lean well back in your seat." "Better out than in." "Duck or grouse." "He who smelt it, dealt it." I learnt a lot from him that cold and bitter winter.

And as the raw spring earth grew grassy again, our shithouse took shape. By now, I was proficient at hitting the nails with the hammer. By late summer, with another two walls in place, it would be time to fit the door. "He who supplied it, denied it" observed my father. It was a lesson I would never forget. Soon my shithouse would be ready to use, and, minutes later, my new book would be on its way.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

TROY, I LOVE YOU DEARLY BUT YOU CAN'T LOAF AROUND HERE FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE.
YOU'RE A GROWN MAN. YOU NEED A JOB AND A PLACE OF YOUR OWN...
I'VE GOT A JOB, DAD. I'M AN ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVIST...
A PROPER JOB. IT'S TIME YOU MOVED OUT OF THE HOUSE AND STARTED FENDING FOR YOURSELF, SON.
I SUPPOSE YOU'RE RIGHT.
I'LL BUILD A TWIGLOO IN THE GARDEN.

Literary Review

Gray's elegy

The Year of the Jouncer
Simon Gray
(Granta Books, £14.99)

THE story so far is this. Late sixtysomething playwright with a heap of grand friends and a highly agreeable lifestyle (Holland Park home, Suffolk cottage, annual winter hol in the Bahamas) decides to devote a notebook to the random thoughts that jostle in his head. The result is *The Smoking Diaries* (2004) about which chums and admirers are very kind. Julian Barnes declares that it's the funniest thing he's read all year and fast friend Alan Yentob bears it reverentially away to the small screen. Even before this validation, though, our man is seated once more upon the bright, Bahamian strand, brow furrowed, fag in hand and Diet Coke before him, to begin a sequel...

What does Simon Gray write about? The charm of these heroically unpunctuated musings is supposed to lie in their juxtapositions: the hifalutin and the downhome; the professional and the domestic; the grey London dawn and the sultry Caribbean forenoon. Harold Pinter and Lady Antonia arrive to open discussions on the latest script and the pile of Green & Black organic white chocolate stacks up in the study drawer. Theatrical contemporaries are waved off to their Green Room in the sky and the cat nabs another vole. The less than satisfactory pair of new shoes and Annabelle, the down and out at the supermarket gate, drift simultaneously by, the whole underpinned – more or less – by some amnesiac glances in the direction of childhood. "Jouncing", by the way, refers to the author's habit of rolling noisily in his bed through his infant years until at last discouraged by a hairbrush tied to his pyjamas.

Ah well, we were all young once. And, growing old, we all have our little foibles, our weaknesses and dislikes. Mr Gray's, in no particular order, are the prime minister, the Nanny State, critics, Milton Keynes ("a town designed for a future that it's somehow missed, so that it's both aggressively modern and hopelessly out of date"), Peter Jackson's "foul and vacuous" *Lord of the Rings*, British cinema ("vile gangster films in which disgusting people mangle and shoot each other") and anyone who frowns at the kippering of one's lungs with cigarette smoke. Never mind, though. Harold thinks the new play is "wonderful" and Antonia is wearing a very pretty hat.

What buggers all this up, alas, is the hulking gap between the promise of the tone and the actuality. What might in volume one have been taken for artlessness looks, come volume two, like the worst kind of contrivance. To take one of Mr G's particular, and most advertised, failings – his vagueness about dates – I didn't believe for a moment the claim that he couldn't remember even the decade in which John F. Kennedy died without a complex recalibration of his own past life. The ramblings about JFK, inspired by an attempt to remember when he first saw Denis Compton, are a prime example of *The Year of the Jouncer's* capacity to irritate, capped by the usual shoulder-shrug. He could look it up on Google, Gray reflects, "but why bother, as I don't really want to know, and will forget it immediately after I've written it down". So why bother about any of this, the reader wonders?

To be fair, once one has swerved past the habitual thesp glad-handing ("the cunning and expertise of Peter Bowles, the complete originality of Edward Fox" etc, etc) and the taken-for-grantedness of the social arrangements, at the heart of the book lies a small kernel of interest. The remembrance of his dead friend Alan Bates and the yearnings over his sixth-form crush, Robert Symonds (the spelling of whose name is, typically, in doubt) have an unforced and concentrated quality conspicuously absent from the first nights and the fine cuisine. In the end, you won't be at all surprised to hear, this is an exercise in elegy. And yet the thing being elegised is far more nebulous than place, person or teenage sensation. Behind the comfortable façade a whole world – that lost 60s universe of beautiful people, Harold and Antonia, saccharine sticks of metropolitan candy – is gently descending into dust. The only slight mitigation is that Gray doesn't blame it on Mrs Thatcher.

FIRST DRAFTS

The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman.
You join me as I write the first sentance. Now come with me into this the second sentance. Ooh look we're already in the third se
Poorsall

Lawrence Sterne

BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ TRAVEL publisher Lonely Planet's alliance with Chinese publishing house SDX Joint Publishing Company, to produce Chinese language editions of its guidebooks, raises an interesting question. How will Lonely Planet's reputation for "trustworthy, frank and insightful" advice sit with the somewhat less open and independent culture of a state-owned Chinese publisher?

Will oriental gadabouts who buy the books be allowed to be told of the best places to indulge in decadent capitalist pleasures around the world, as per the Lonely Planet guides we know and love; or will they be presented with a government-vetted list of culturally-safe destinations such as museums, zoos inhabited by Chinese-loaned pandas and Communist Party barn dances?

'Bookworm'

LIBRARY NEWS

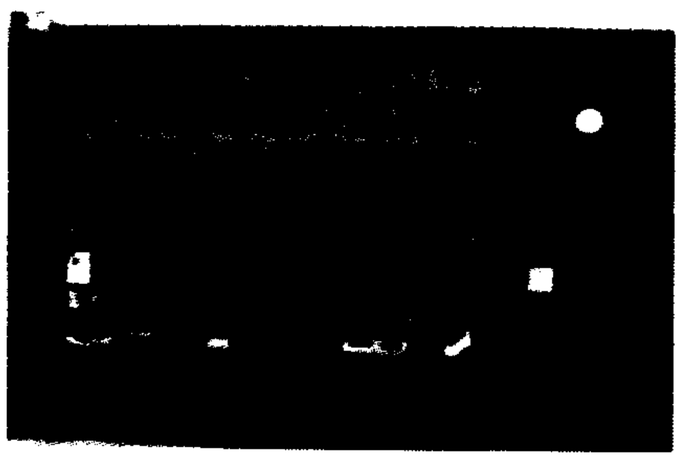
■ THE library in the Lancashire village of Wheatley Lane doesn't just provide its small community with reading material – it hosts a Citizen's Advice Bureau and a chiropodist service too. But not for much longer, if Lancashire County Council shuts *nine* of its local libraries as a penny-pinching move.

The libraries under threat are all small, with limited opening hours and few staff, so the proposed saving of £141,000 in annual running costs won't make much of a dent in the council's £13.5m budget shortfall – but flogging off a few of the buildings the council says are currently "wasting resources" when closed, might raise a bob or two in the short term.

The council insists that the people who use the threatened libraries all have "another better facility nearby" – but campaigners (including retired Wheatley Lane librarian Shirley Ellis who just last year was given an MBE for services to libraries) point out that "nearby" is relative if you're an elderly person trying to carry heavy hardbacks from the large print section on foot or public transport.

UNLIKELY SIGNS

Part 94



Twickenham

LUVVIES

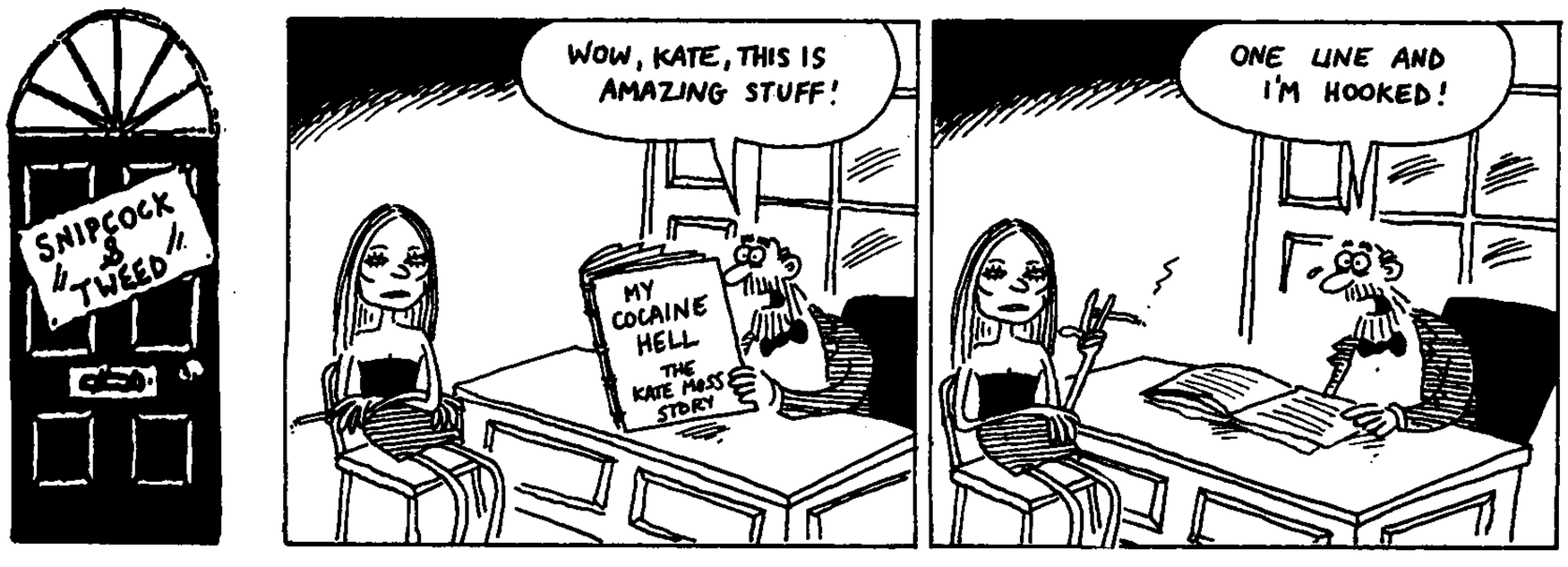
What have you done with all your punky stage outfits?

I have a house to keep my press cuttings, costumes, head-dresses, stage make-up and books that refer to me. There's a room of recordings of every TV show I've done and another full of fan mail.

TOYAH WILLCOX
Now Magazine

Submitted by J. Perkins.

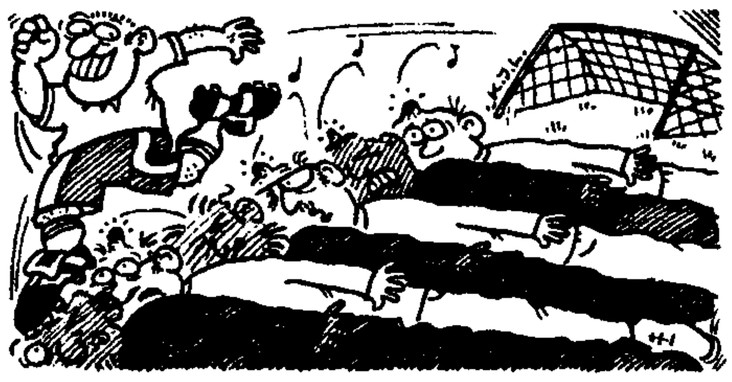
An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.



Pseuds Corner

When the Roman empire split in two, it became the talk of the classical world. It was all the work of the emperor Theodosius, who created the empires of the east and west in 395 AD. Much the same controversy was aroused when the rock band Yes split in twain many centuries later.

CHRIS WELCH
Sleeve notes to the album 'Talk' by Yes



The sound of studs on a player's head was almost musical, a sort of xylophonic arpeggio of aluminium on bone.

EDDIE BUTLER
Observer

Miche Fabre Lewin works as a culinary artist who improvises kitchen-studios and edible happenings in diverse settings. Her work responds instinctually to the spirit of food and place and entices people into a gastronomy that is ecological and inspirational. It is a devotional and social healing praxis that researches, reconnects and celebrates food cultures, cooking, farming and the art of the table.

From the speaker biographies for the Soil Association's annual conference

When Enoch Powell sat the classical scholarship exam at Trinity College, Cambridge, he offered two versions in the Greek prose paper, one in the style of Herodotus, and one in the style of Thucydides.

Is it fanciful to suggest that his biographer, Simon Heffer, is inspired by this example to follow the methodical reasoning on political questions of Thucydides every Wednesday, and the witty, anecdotal, buttonholing style of Herodotus every Saturday?

DAVID PHILLIPS
Letter to *Daily Telegraph*

This is everything that art should be nowadays – simple, sophisticated, intellectual, emotional. In 100 years, these images will be regarded as a definitive masterpiece of our time, yet they are nothing more than a few frames taken from a CCTV camera that guards a cash machine.

So what makes this art great? First, the process of selection – the French conceptual artist Sophie Calle spent nearly 20 years considering how to turn a pile of VHS tapes of CCT footage into a work of art. She eventually made a video film about how she never succeeded in making what she wanted, which she called Unfinished. Yet nowadays this lack of finish is the finish: it's the equivalent of the drawings of a Renaissance master for a never completed sculpture…

Then there's the emotional twist on conceptual art that Calle's art provides: look at the man's expression as he takes money out of the machine. His brow furrows, he seems to be having a problem. This is not simply a leftwing conceptual work about consumerism and capitalism – it's a universal image of our emotional relationship with technology.

BEN LEWIS
Weekend Guardian Magazine

We believe that it is possible to achieve accelerated saliency and share of consumer mind space by adopting an iconistic approach to branding.

From the pi global website

CONTRIBUTORS: Barry Lees, Ben Black, Philip Conford, Talha Burki, Jonathan Erskine, Phil Carter.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

NIGER URANIUM

Telegram Sam

TONY BLAIR's claim in his September 2002 dossier that "there is intelligence that Iraq has sought the supply of significant quantities of uranium from Africa", is looking even more dishonest in the light of a newly-released US State Department telegram sent in March 2002 and entitled *"Niger-Iraq: Sale of Niger Uranium to Iraq Unlikely"*.

It was sent to the US embassy in London marked "NOFORN" – meaning that it should not be given to "foreign nationals". However, given the close relationship between British and American intelligence, it seems highly improbable the contents were not shared with UK analysts.

American campaign group Judicial Watch forced the US authorities to release the telegram under the US Freedom of Information Act. The paper, written by US intelligence, says that an alleged plan for "500 tons" of uranium "to be delivered xxxxxxx [*words deleted*] in one year" was unlikely because it would mean "25 hard to conceal 10-ton tractor trailers would be used to transport the off-the-books uranium. Because Niger is landlocked, the convoy would have to cross at least one international border and travel at least 1,000 miles to reach the sea. Moving such a quantity over such a distance would be very difficult, particularly because the French would be indisposed to approve or cloak this arrangement".

Even if the US did not fully share these words with British spooks, the UK could easily have made the same calculations and seen that the claims in Blair's September dossier were implausible. These words also show that western intelligence bodies were using information from forged Italian documents earlier than they have admitted. The US claims it received the "Niger forgeries" in October 2002. It finally passed the papers alleging a Niger-Iraq atomic deal to the International Atomic Energy Authority (IAEA) in February 2003. The IAEA then exposed the documents as fake, but by then the drift to war was unstoppable. However, the March 2002 telegram refers specifically to "500 tons" of uranium – exactly the same amount in the Niger forgeries which the US says it didn't receive until October! Mathematically-minded *Eye* readers will also note that twenty five 10-ton tractors would only carry 250 tons of Uranium, not 500 tons. However, the Niger forgeries specify the "500 tons" will be delivered "in two phases".

The US released the telegram after a legal appeal but still blacked out some words, including a space that appears to refer to two separate deliveries. There are several more very close matches between the March telegram and the Niger forgeries, largely ignored by newspapers, but outlined by American "blog" called "the left coaster".

Indications that US intelligence had the information in the Niger forgeries before October 2002 also makes the UK claims of "separate" intelligence on Niger less likely. It suggests that the many rumours about Iraqi-Niger uranium washing around western intelligence were all merely different versions of the Niger forgeries.

British intelligence could easily have reached all this obvious conclusion, even without direct help from America. Instead, Tony Blair put the African uranium claim in his September dossier. As a consequence, not only did Britain put its weight behind this unconvincing claim, but the Blair government also gave the Bush administration the ammunition it needed to over-ride its own intelligence assessments, and make a similar false claim about Iraqi uranium plots in the president's pre-war state-of-the-union speech.

NHS PRIVATISATION

United they fall

EVERY TIME Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt opened her mouth last week about failing hospitals or health care, NHS finances or clinical decisions, she repeated the government's determination to offer "patient choice" like a mantra.

Constant repetition, however, does not make it a reality – as patients in north-east Derbyshire have learned. In Langwith, one of the area's most deprived ex-mining villages, respected local GP Elizabeth Barrett had worked with the community to put in a bid to the NE Derbyshire Primary Care Trust (PCT) to take over GP services for the 3,000 residents. With a pharmacist and nurse, they had the support of the parish council, which even offered them a site in the village for free in which to set up. After consulting all and sundry, their bid was totally patient-led and centred, as required.

Despite meeting the criteria set out by the PCT (chief executive: Martin MacShane, brother of arch Blairite, Denis), Dr Barrett and her tiny team were not even shortlisted. Instead, the contract for Langwith, along with a nearby inner city practice in Derby, is to go to the *Eye*'s old friends at United Health, the US health giant and $28bn (£16bn) corporation (see *Eye* 1110).

United is evidently so keen to break into the UK's new multi-billion pound health market, however, that even a tiny practice in Langwith can provide a shoe in the door.

But local opposition may thwart its efforts again. The parish council is spearheading the fight which is gaining support from local councillors and MPs. They all want to know how on earth a giant multi-national with no local knowledge, limited NHS experience and no staff could possibly win top points for a contract when local GPs were, like Dr Barrett, not even shortlisted, or, like some of her local colleagues, might as well have not have been.

One Derbyshire patient has consulted lawyers about a possible judicial review to argue that the decision to let the contract to UHE without consulting patients or the overview and scrutiny committee of Derbyshire County Council was unlawful.

Further, there are question about whether United had an unfair competitive advantage. The year before it was given another NHS contract in the area to devise "strategy planning". For this it had access to patient data on both primary care and admission to hospitals. So while the local GPs and health professionals were treating patients as well as preparing their bids to run the local service, United was able to draw up a glossy presentation with inside information and the backing of a huge international corporation.

Allyson Pollock, professor of health policy at University College London and author of *NHS plc*, is another who is alarmed at the latest bid by United and the government's determination to embrace the company. "If UnitedHealth Europe is so keen on helping the poor and the disadvantaged then perhaps they should begin with all those they deny care to in the US. All the evidence shows that universal health care cannot be delivered by private corporations whose sole rationale is delivering profits for shareholders by cherry picking profitable treatments and services."

UnitedHealth Group

PS: Hospitals throughout Britain are under threat from hit squads of accountants instructed to cut the £620m NHS budget deficit, but the Birmingham and the Black Country Health Authority hit on a really novel solution: it spent three years worth of nurses' and midwives' training money to clear £13m debts and balance the budget this year.

The Royal College of Nursing is appalled, but the beancounters were unabashed. Who needs nurses who know what they're doing, after all?

CUSTOMS SCANDAL

Beyond the call of duty

ON THE day parliament broke up for Christmas, Treasury Minister John Healey quietly slipped out the news that there would be no criminal charges against the three men who were at the top of HM Customs and Excise when it misled the courts and withheld evidence from a judicial inquiry into the collapse of more than 100 convictions for massive duty frauds.

But the *Eye* has discovered that, in sharp contrast to the blameless picture painted by Healey, the actions of the then Customs chairman Richard Broadbent, head of law enforcement Terry Byrne and chief solicitor David Pickup call into question their fitness for any high office.

By the time it emerged that Customs had failed to disclose that Alfred Allington, its key witness in 40 trials for duty frauds run through a bonded warehouse called London City Bond (LCB), was what's known in the trade as a "participating informant", a series of unsafe convictions had already begun to unravel. Scores of convicted duty fraudsters were walking free on appeal while billions of pounds of public money was lost to the Treasury. It is now clear that the failures in handling Allington (euphemistically termed "status drift") were unlikely to be the only ones. If, as seems likely, the weaknesses were systemic, many other convictions involving bonded warehouses elsewhere could also be unsafe.

As the scale of the LCB scandal became apparent, in 2002 a judicial inquiry was launched under Mr Justice Butterfield, whose terms of reference promised "unrestricted access to HM Customs and Excise staff, papers and facilities". Butterfield duly reported in July 2003, recommending a number of changes and criticising the fraud investigation but crucially declaring that he had received "total cooperation" and that "nothing I have seen suggests any individual or corporate lack of integrity". Only some months later were questions raised over the way information had been sat on, prompting the Metropolitan Police, already investigating the handling of the fraud cases under "Operation Gestalt", to turn its attention to the way Customs had dealt with the judicial inquiry.

Months of poring over emails and interviewing dozens of staff revealed apparent contempt for Mr Justice Butterfield's inquiry at the very top of the organisation. As soon as the judge set to work, chairman Broadbent decided that "the department's approach to the review will be guided by a steering group consisting of Richard Broadbent, David Pickup and Terry Byrne". An internal liaison unit was set up, reporting to Broadbent, through which "all requests for material from the review and all internally commissioned work relating to the review will without exception be channelled". With this tight-knit group in place, Customs' top brass could closely control what Butterfield saw – even though he had been promised "unrestricted access".

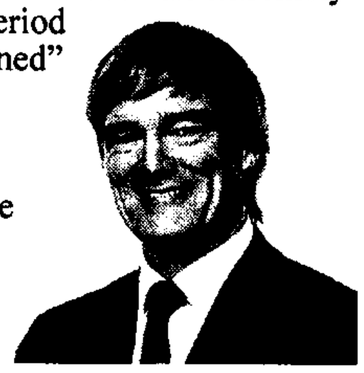
As the inquiry progressed it became increasingly obvious to Customs officials that the faults in handling Allington were likely to have been repeated elsewhere. The chief solicitor David Pickup learnt – through a note from one of his solicitors designed "to bring this possibility to the attention of senior management and, if appropriate, the Butterfield team" – that informants had been similarly used in prosecutions for scams at several other bonded warehouses.

Broadbent, however, decided not to look at other informant cases, not wanting to "open that can of worms" in his words, while Pickup, one official revealed, approached the possibility of widespread "status drift" with the view that "we wouldn't conceal it, but need not make a point of passing that onto the review team either." The steering group duly endorsed the decision to keep quiet about the potential scale of the problem – which would have been of great interest to Butterfield – unless asked.

One particularly crucial document, prepared painstakingly for Butterfield by Customs officials, became known as the "spine": a chronology of the important events in the LCB operations with references to the papers that would be crucial to Butterfield's review. Without explanation, however, Broadbent's steering group decided not to hand this over, giving the judge instead a briefer record that lacked 47 of the "events" in the spine, four of which related to the management of informants and dealings between key witness Allington and investigators – matters that were central to how Customs had handled the fraud cases and subsequent trials.

Even more alarming was the decision not to pass on a log, discovered three weeks before Butterfield reported, which showed that as far back as 1994 Customs had registered Allington as an informant. In other words, not only had Customs failed to acknowledge in countless prosecutions that he was an informant, they had even ignored their own records in doing so. This damning fact wasn't revealed to Butterfield until the day before he published his report – conveniently for the Customs bosses, far too late to be incorporated. An internal email from a week before Butterfield reported proved that Terry Byrne knew of the logs but failed to hand them over then. Could it have been because, as he recorded in the email, "We obviously risk serious criticism from, and related to, Butterfield for this"?

Although the Crown Prosecution Service has decided the trio's cover-ups don't provide sufficient evidence for criminal charges, some sort of disciplinary measures might have been expected. But not a bit of it. Treasury Minister Healey lamented how "this has been an extremely difficult and unpleasant period for the individuals concerned" and reported that HMRC "will now discuss with David Pickup a return to work" (he and Terry Byrne were suspended in 2004). In the meantime Byrne has retired while Richard Broadbent (pictured) was knighted for his services to Customs shortly before he resigned in September 2003. He is now chairman of Arriva bus and train company and a director of Barclays Bank – on whose corporate governance committee he now sits!



COUNTERFEIT DRUGS

Fakes and fatalities

BILL and Melinda Gates are wasting their money trying to develop new drugs against malaria, says Nigeria's national drug regulator Dr Dora Akunyili (pictured). Her startling assessment stems from the growing racket in fake medicines that now accounts for half of Africa's drugs and is destroying new drugs by spreading premature resistance to them.

Last October Bill Gates gave $258m – $107m of it to UK drug giant GlaxoSmithKline – to combat malaria. "It's a disgrace that the world has allowed malaria deaths to double in the last 20 years," Gates said. So it is; but why has Gates refused to discuss the question of the fake malaria drugs that are believed to cause most of the deaths, and why is GSK so secretive on the subject?

There is a fortune to be made in real and fake drugs as a devastating resurgence of malaria grips Africa, killing more than a million people a year, 90 percent of them children under five. In January the World Health Organisation warned that the last effective treatment for malaria, artemisinin, is threatened with resistance. It appealed to drug companies to speed up development of new drugs as Africa's 500 million malaria sufferers could lose all protection.

Scientists want to know how malaria, which had almost vanished 30 years ago, could make such a comeback and resist every new drug thrown at it. According to Dr Akunyili, the resurgence and resistance to new drugs are down to the counterfeiting racket which is rife in Africa. Dr Akunyili, a London-trained pharmaceutical scientist, has personal experience of it: she is a survivor of fake malaria drugs and saw her sister Vivian die after using fake insulin. And after years of official neglect, she decided to take on Africa's notorious fake drug gangs.

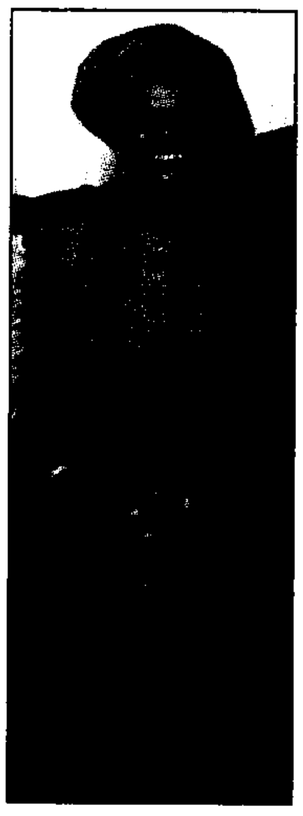
In London last December, the heroic "Dr Dora", as she is known, collected the International Service Human Rights Award for continuing her fight after her offices and laboratories were fire-bombed and she narrowly survived a machine gun attack that killed her driver.

Dr Akunyili discovered that fakes with little active ingredient feed the malaria parasite weak doses, like an inoculation, that quickly breed resistant strains. They can even infect patients who are taking genuine drugs. "It is frightening," she says. "You don't even have to take the fakes."

Dr Akunyili predicted the latest malaria crisis and believes that if charitable donors like Bill and Melinda Gates really want to save children from malaria, "It is more important for them to take care of quality of drugs than to give money for new drugs."

In Rome from 16-18 February the World Health Organisation will host a conference to "combat" the fake drug racket. But will the assembled government representatives at last agree effective international legislation to fight the racket and end the drug industry's secrecy?

The sad truth is that the criminals are only one reason for the misery. Dr Akunyili and colleagues at Oxford University say the drug companies themselves have left millions to suffer and die without warning while they keep life-saving data on fake drugs confidential to avoid bad publicity and loss of sales (Public Library of Science Medicine). Says Dr Akunyili: "Everything is shrouded in secrecy and that is actually a part of what is encouraging drug counterfeiting."



The Oxford study was prompted by GSK's refusal to share data about dangerous fakes of its child malaria syrup, Halfan. When Ghana's chief drug regulator, Mr Kyerematen Agyarko, found diluted fakes of GSK child Halfan, he says he was visited by staff from GSK's London head office who took away several bottles of the fake for testing and told him to withhold his media warning to avoid "damage" to the genuine GSK product. No warning went out. GSK flatly denied the incident and the existence of fake child Halfan in Ghana. But faced with a BBC Radio *File on 4* report (in October 2004), GSK admitted it had met with Mr Agyarko and had taken his fake samples. It denies asking him to withhold his warning.

The UK media chose not to cover this aspect of the malaria crisis and Chancellor Gordon Brown subsequently pledged a staggering £3bn pre-sale to GSK for an experimental new malaria vaccine. This drew strong protests from Prof Nick White of Oxford's Centre for Tropical Medicine, and Cambridge University's Prof Bob Snow. They pointed out that this was enough money to cut malaria drastically in many parts of Africa – **now**.

Will delegates in Rome take note?

Police farce

SCOTLAND Yard has just been praised to the skies by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies for reducing civil claims and saving legal and compensation costs, and for the "beacon of excellence" that is the force's "anti-corruption command".

What a happy coincidence that the inspection coincided with the dropping of an embarrassing claim for damages from two former detectives who were at the centre of an interminable and expensive disciplinary case arising from a failed anti-corruption investigation.

The protracted probe by the Yard's Complaints Investigation Branch (CIB), a failed criminal prosecution and a seven-year suspension on full pay for former DI John Redgrave and DC Michael Charman are believed to have cost the Met (ie taxpayers) many millions of pounds.

Following a disciplinary hearing in May 2004, both officers were eventually required to resign for "discreditable" conduct over claims that they had taken steps to destroy a document. In the meantime they had launched a civil claim for damages, alleging wrongful arrest and malicious prosecution against the Met. At the end of last year after negotiations, they withdrew the claim and both sides agreed to cover their own legal costs – believed to be in the region of around £100,000 each.

The saga began in 1994 when a dodgy police informer claimed to have "bunged" the two detectives £50,000 – an allegation he subsequently withdrew. Nevertheless CIB set up a "sting" involving Charman's then girlfriend who worked for the CPS. She took home a planted document, which was shown to the two detectives. The three – Redgrave, Charman and his girlfriend – were then each charged with conspiracy to pervert the course of justice and breach of the Official Secrets Act. But that case never got beyond Bow Street magistrates, who kicked it out in 1999. An appeal by the CPS and the Yard to get it reinstated was also dismissed by a high court judge. The officers lodged their civil claim against the Met, but remained suspended on full pay pending disciplinary proceedings. Eventually they were required to resign.

An end to the civil litigation – described as a personal disaster for the two men and a financial disaster for the taxpayer – is not an end to the affair, which is now in its 12th year.

The two former detectives are still funded by the Police Federation for an appeal to the Home Secretary against the requirement that they resign. If they win, they would be temporarily reinstated and given back pay for the last two years. No date is yet set for that appeal.

BARRATT HOMES

Absolutely fuming

FIVE years ago Lois Grayson discovered that her home, on the site of a converted paint factory in London's East End, was contaminated with naphthalene – a potentially carcinogenic chemical used in the manufacture of paint.

Naphthalene vapour was entering her house in Barratt Homes's Coopers Walk development via the cellar. While living there she experienced kidney problems, migraines and asthma. There are no legal exposure limits for naphthalene in the UK, but the levels in Ms Grayson's home were 700 times the legal US limit for chronic inhalation. She was not the only one. Tests revealed that her neighbour Anita Drewery had large quantities of a naphthalene derivative in her bloodstream.

Although test holes drilled by the environmental health department of Newham council confirmed the presence of the chemical, the developers claimed that their own trial pits, dug when the factory had been converted, had not found any problems – though they have presented no evidence of this. Barratts told residents that the company would take no responsibility.

While still denying any liability, Barratt says it will offer to install a physical barrier and better ventilation in the houses' cellars when it next meets residents. This is unlikely to satisfy the residents, who say they want the contaminated soil beneath their homes removed.

Of the 12 one- and two-bedroom homes, which originally sold for around £70,000 each in the late 1980s, eight of them – numbers 129 to 136 – are contaminated and currently worth virtually nothing. However, four houses – numbers 137 to 140 – had their cellar areas flooded with concrete to a depth of about eight feet back in the 1980s. Free from contamination, they are now worth some £200,000 each.

By an amazing coincidence, of the four naphthalene-free houses, three were first purchased by people closely associated with Barratt Homes. Two were bought by former Barratt directors Ivor Skinner and Dennis Saville, while the third was sold to Sharon Reynolds, wife of another Barratt director, Richard Reynolds. Just fancy that!

ROYAL MAIL SELL-OFF

Post mortem

NEW Royal Mail director Helen Weir, whose current day job is finance director of Lloyds TSB, will certainly feel at home among the suits earning six-figure sums for running the post (see *Eye* 1134).

Her main claim to fame comes from her time as director of B&Q owner Kingfisher where she received a £330,000 relocation package for moving 40 miles up the road.

Weir, whose appointment was approved by the Department of Trade and Industry, is widely expected to use her corporate finance experience to help implement plans for a part privatisation of Royal Mail through a sale of shares to an employee trust. The government's evident sell-off intentions won't, however, have an easy parliamentary ride: an early-day motion supporting full public ownership, put down by Labour MP John Grogan just before Christmas, attracted 208 signatures, including 193 from Labour MPs.

Trade Minister Barry Gardiner also faces pressure on the future of rural post offices. A public consultation on the likely end to the £150m annual subsidy has just been withdrawn while the Pensions Secretary John Hutton has announced the termination of the post office card account, used by 4m pensioners, that provided much of the struggling outlets' revenue.

During a debate on the future of rural post offices earlier this month Gardiner was reminded of his government's record on shutting down urban ones. "Lest anybody should forget," replied Gardiner, "each one of those 2,500 closures happened in a place where the sub-postmaster wanted to close and volunteered for closure. Nobody was forced out of business by [Royal Mail] or government. They closed because they chose to do so."

In fact, lest anybody should forget, they closed to widespread public opposition after Consignia (as Royal Mail then was) offered compensation, ie bribes, averaging £60,000. Facing uncertain futures, the sub-postmasters naturally bit the company's hand off. Don't be surprised by an equally ruthless approach to even less profitable rural post offices.

JOSEPH SCHOLES

Death in care

THE mother of Joseph Scholes, a "highly traumatised and vulnerable teenager" who just days after his 16th birthday hanged himself in Stoke Heath young offenders' institution, has failed in her legal bid to force the Home Secretary to hold a public inquiry into her son's death.

The rejection of the case by a high court judge has angered MPs, senior clergy, human rights and prison reform groups who have all been fighting for an inquiry into a justice system which sends far more children into custody than any other European country (about 2,900 at the last count) without the means or resources to begin to care for those who are vulnerable or suicidal.

The coroner John Ellery was so disturbed by the catalogue of failure revealed at the inquest he conducted into Joseph's death in 2002 that he took the unprecedented step of writing to the then Home Secretary David Blunkett, calling for a public inquiry and saying the scope of his inquest had been too limited. He was concerned that just about every expert and witness called before him had agreed that Joseph should never have been sent to Stoke Heath in Cheshire in the first place.

Joseph had a long and sad history of depression, suicidal tendencies and self harm. In the words of one expert, he was "more victim than offender". Two weeks before he was sentenced, he had slashed his own face 30 times, the deepest gash cutting himself to the bone. Nine days after being sentenced, he hanged himself.

Joseph had the misfortune of coming to court just as Home Office ministers and the lord chief justice announced a crackdown on mobile phone theft. Joseph had agreed to keep watch for some kids from his children's home who had gone out to steal three mobile phones. The court accepted that he was on the periphery, but sentenced him to a two-year training order. Because no place was available for him in a local authority centre, he ended up in Stoke Heath and in a hospital wing so grim it would have been condemned had it been a children's home. The moment he was taken off suicide watch he hanged himself in a cell.

Under article two – the right to life provision of the European Convention on Human Rights – the government is obliged to hold a full public investigation when there has been a death in custody. The inquest did not examine either the sentencing policy or the extent to which policy and lack of resources resulted in him being held in a totally unsuitable and unsafe place.

"The problem is a regime – embracing both sentencing policy and the conditions under which the sentence will inevitably be served – which repeatedly cause vulnerable children to be locked in unsafe institutions," said the family's barrister, Tim Owen QC. But his argument was rejected by the court, which ruled that though the inquest had not explored sentencing policy, that was a matter for parliament. And – contrary to the coroner's assertion that his inquest was too restricted – Mr Justice Bennett decided that he had conducted such a thorough investigation he had fulfilled the Home Secretary's human rights obligations.

Twenty-nine children have died in custody in the last 15 years. Five have died in the "care" of the state since Joseph Scholes killed himself. The family will appeal.

PS: Who has the Youth Justice Board asked to help sort out the crisis in the care of young offenders? Step forward PricewaterhouseCoopers, the consultancy that will be looking at how Britain locks up kids over the next 10 years. PwC will study the number and size of the child jails, examine whether or not to house young offenders separately within existing prisons or whether to develop whole new sites. No doubt it will also see if any more of the "secure estate" and its services can be hived off to business friends. None of this would be necessary if an inquiry – like the one proposed into the death of Joseph Scholes – found better ways to deal with troubled youngsters.

You can contact the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

AS THE major Enron fraud trial of prime targets Ken Lay and Jeffrey Skilling kicks off in Houston, back in London a decision is expected shortly in the appeal that will decide whether three former NatWest bankers also face Texas justice.

But the appeal court decision in the NatWest Three case will not just decide whether they, and by extension former Morgan Crucible chief executive Ian Norris, can be extradited. It could also indirectly influence whether the £400m fraud prosecution of six generic drug suppliers to the National Health Service by the Serious Farce Office proceeds or has to be dropped.

The appeal court has been asked to rule that the new UK extradition agreement with the US is flawed because it is so one-sided. American prosecutors no longer need to make a case to obtain extradition unlike the due process still required by US courts. Furthermore, the US Senate has yet to agree reciprocal arrangements. Lord Justice Laws has already stated that judges are "troubled" by the fact that the NatWest Three are being prosecuted for defrauding Enron of $7.3m when the loser was the bank.

If the Laws ruling is that the extradition treaty is flawed, the extradition case against Norris will also fail. His appeal hearing was halted last month pending the NatWest ruling. Whoever loses is certain to appeal. So, the Norris issue could also be put on hold pending a Law Lords hearing.

But it is not the extradition ruling itself which now threatens the NHS case (possibly the most complex and expensive the SFO has ever brought) and which has already delayed the charges previously expected before Christmas in an investigation which began in 2001. What could derail the entire prosecution is another ruling in the Norris case over whether or not operating a price-fixing cartel was a criminal offence before the Enterprise Act 2002.

Last year a judge ruled that price-fixing by a "dishonest cartel" was equivalent to conspiracy to defraud – and so extraditable. It is that legal equation which is vital to the SFO case. And it is that which the appeal court is being asked to cancel.

The issue has not yet been debated in the appeal court because of the extradition question. And it may still not be if the appeal court decides that the NatWest Three – and thereby Norris – cannot be extradited. The court could decide in those circumstances that it did not need to consider the "dishonest cartel" issue. Then it will be up to the SFO to make the "price-fixing is a crime" case after it has brought charges. It was always anticipated that the companies and individuals concerned would fight on these grounds pre-trial.

But if the appeal court decides the Norris extradition can proceed under the treaty, it will then have to decide the cartel crime question. Then the Norris ruling on price-fixing will become all important to the SFO. If it was then decreed that price-fixing was not a crime, the NHS case would almost certainly face collapse as all the alleged offences occurred before 2002. The SFO would then probably encourage the Crown Prosecution Service to take that ruling to the Law Lords in order to rescue its case.

On the other hand, if the Norris ruling is that price-fixing was a crime before 2002, equivalent to conspiracy to defraud, then the SFO intention to bring conspiracy charges against the companies and directors will be vindicated. So much so that it could even encourage the multinational defendants – Merck, Teva and Ranbaxy – to make a commercial decision to settle even though this could mean record fines of more than £10m apiece. Such a decision would be made easier by the fact that all the executives who participated in the secret cartel meetings to fix prices and supplies of penicillin antibiotics and the blood thinning agent warfarin to the NHS have now left their subsidiaries – Generics UK, Norton Healthcare and Ranbaxy UK.

"I'm looking for an 'Enjoy Your Retirement, Notwithstanding That You Will Not Now Receive A Final Salary Pension After All' card"

A decision by the multinationals to settle would leave their former employees who are in the frame with little option but also to plead guilty. They and their ex-employers could plead in mitigation that at the time, from 1996 onwards, they were unaware that what they were doing – ripping off the NHS by over-charging – was illegal! Merck and Ranbaxy have already settled civil claims brought against them by the Department of Health and paid £12m and £4.5m without admitting liability.

Such a move would leave exposed the smaller British companies – Kent Pharmaceuticals, Regent-GM Laboratories (now in liquidation) and the listed Goldshield Group. Here the executives involved are still involved: Kent chairman Denis O'Neill; Luma Auchi, daughter of Iraqi multi-millionaire owner Nadhmi; and Goldshield's top executives, Ajit and Kirti Patel.

Usually, once one company cuts a deal to plead guilty and pay, the others rush to join – especially if the price of settlement is full cooperation with the prosecutors. And the first deal is always the best deal. So a favourable ruling in the Norris case is likely to see charges brought against the six companies plus possibly two others and up to 10 executives. That could happen by April if the rulings in the Norris case are handed down by then. The SFO is likely to proceed even if Norris takes his cartel case to the Law Lords. What is less clear is whether the Norris price-fixing ruling could be further delayed by an appeal to the House of Lords in the NatWest Three case.

If, however, the SFO is hit by a Norris double-whammy (extradition treaty flawed and price-fixing not a crime) and that is upheld, then it could be forced to drop the entire planned prosecution which has already cost more than £10m. The same fate could still await if the Norris case does not resolve the price-fixing issue and it has to be fought all over again before a trial can begin. Any trial now is unlikely before next year at the earliest, if at all.

HUNDREDS of British investors have suddenly learned how risky those bargain homes in the sun can be with the collapse of a major development in Northern Cyprus run by fugitive drug dealer Gary Robb.

The appropriately named Robb, already wanted in Britain, fled to Thailand after HSBC froze up to £10m being transferred to accounts in the Far East. The collapse of his Aga Developments and its Amaranta Village project has left investors, many retired expats, in crisis.

That a 400-home development could be run with impunity by a man wanted in Britain since he jumped bail in 1997 says all you need to know about the Turkish Cypriot regime. But Robb is not alone. Northern Cyprus is home to several other British fugitives, including most famously Polly Peck boss Asil Nadir. As Britain does not recognise Northern Cyprus, there is no extradition agreement. Then there are the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot drug gangs who launder their profits, much of it from the UK heroin trade, through local casinos, banks and property developments. Not to mention the brass plate banks which provide laundromats for Russian and Balkan organised crime.

But none of this has prevented Cherie Blair from becoming involved in a legal case which will have at its heart the legitimacy of the unrecognised government which presides over this situation. The vocal demonstrations that greeted Foreign Secretary Jack Straw's visit last week to Cyprus give a flavour of the diplomatic minefield the Dear Leader has been led into by the decision of his money-conscious consort, aka Cherie Booth QC, to defend the human rights of a British couple ordered to demolish their £160,000 villa in Northern Cyprus by a Greek Cypriot court.

A large part of the defence to be mounted by David and Linda Orams will rely on the legitimacy of authorisation provided by that unrecognised government to buy and build on land owned by a Greek Cypriot architect who fled

THE DIRECTORS — DREDGE & RIGG

HOW HAVE OUR PEOPLE RESPONDED SINCE WE'VE SCRAPPED THEIR PENSIONS ?
AS WE EXPECTED, SIR JULIAN...
...IT'S MADE THEM VERY BITTER AND RESENTFUL...
... TOWARDS ANY GROUPS OF WORKERS WHO STILL GET ONE!

Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

Vodafone's bad signal

Winners and losers over the past year...

...everyone else on the stock market

+ £340bn

...Vodafone shareholders

–£11bn

when the Turks invaded in 1974.

In November 2004 the Greek Cypriot owner obtained judgment against the Orams. He has now decided to enforce that judgment in Britain under a so far untested 2001 ruling that says that court judgments in one European Union member (Cyprus) are enforceable in another (Britain). The Orams own a home in Britain which could be at risk if the high court ordered that they comply with the Cypriot court judgment which also requires them to pay £10,000 in damages plus £250 a month rent.

It may be difficult for a British court to accept the rulings and legality of an unrecognised state, even one with which Britain has contacts; yet that could be what the Dear Leader's wife will in effect be asking the high court to do. The courts in similar circumstances usually request a binding opinion from the Foreign Office on the status of the government concerned. Even Jack the Poodle would have some difficulty in supporting the Dear Leader's wife on that issue. Only Turkey recognises the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

Britain and Tony Blair are already seen as pro-Turkey by the Cypriots. The right to reclaim properties lost when the Turks invaded to protect the Turkish Cypriot community from a right-wing Greek coup was a key reason why Greek Cypriots voted down a UN sponsored settlement prior to Cyprus joining the EU in 2004.

Hiring Cherie B to represent the Orams was a calculated decision taken by their legal advisors and encouraged by those who it is reported will be picking up the legal tab – local developers who want to reassure those who have bought homes in Northern Cyprus.

A ruling that recognised their legal right to own these homes would be a huge PR boost, not just for the homeowners but also the Turkish Cypriot government. But it would infuriate Greek Cypriots. Ending the division of Cyprus is a precondition for Turkish entry to the EU – a Blair project. The Cyprus government has already attacked Cherie's involvement as "provocative".

According to the Turkish newspaper *Hurriyet*, she signed up after three days of secret talks in Istanbul last May. Others might have paused to consult the Foreign Office. But then the fees could be up to £200,000.

The Foreign Office has been advising Brits buying homes in Northern Cyprus that any political settlement was certain to result in claims for compensation from Greek Cypriot owners. The only legally valid title was that provided by Turkish Cypriots who owned land before 1974. The permits handed out by the TRNC were not good title.

That position has been reinforced by two decisions from the European Court of Human Rights, the most recent only in December. This ordered Turkey to pay potentially hundreds of millions of pounds in compensation to Greek Cypriot landowners who it deemed the continuing rightful owners of properties they lost as a result of the invasion. A decision no doubt being closely studied by Cherie Booth QC.

'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 306

by Cyclops

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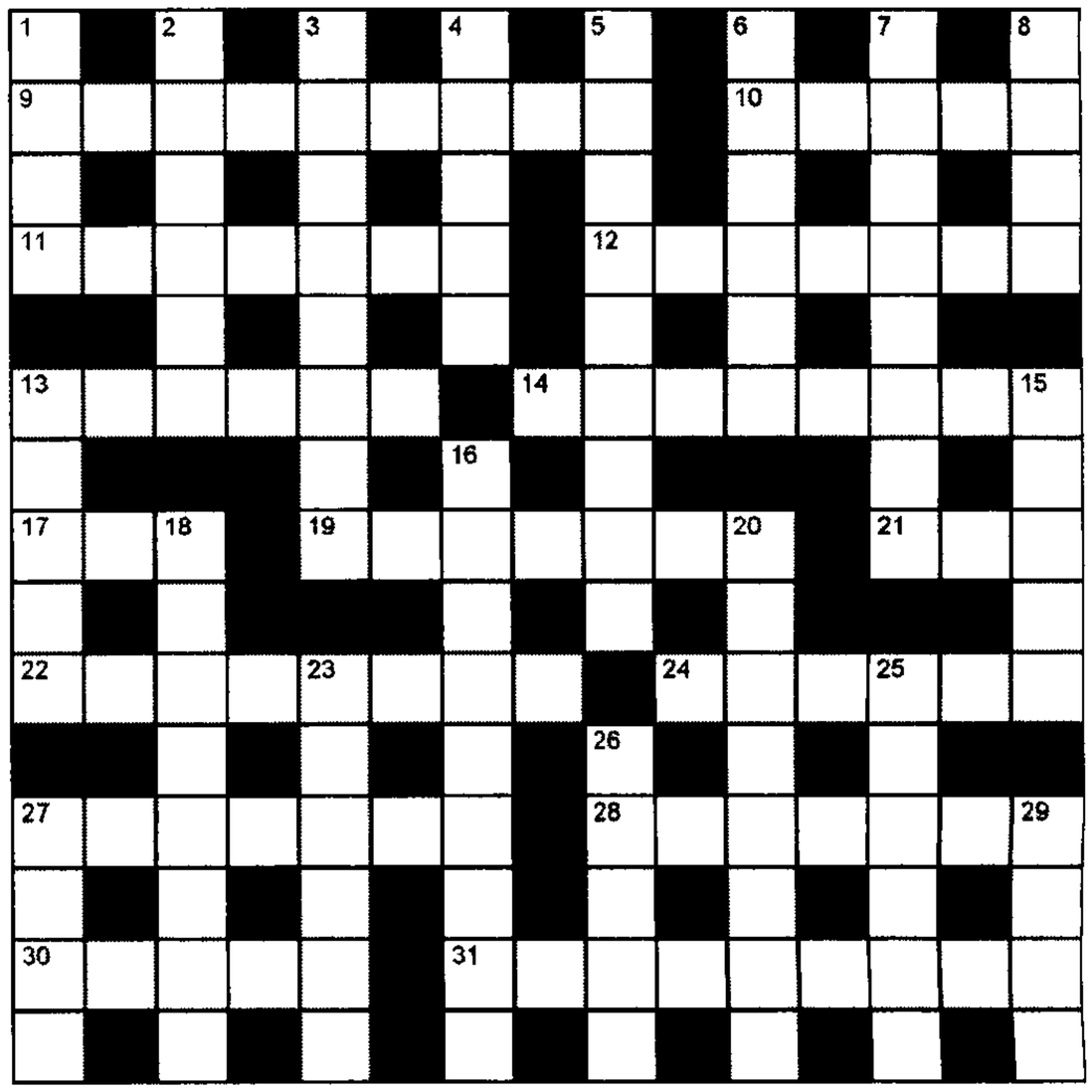
Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

9 It could be politically embarrassing, Lancashire offering to get a Tory leader round (3,6)
10 City: "Cameron's opening broadcast ordinary" (5)
11/12 Ex-leader, a lush existence possibly behind him, one who would be king *and* US president? (7,7)
13 Principles harked back to by vote-seeking politician, leader of Conservatives needing all-round support (6)
14 Queer yob on reconnoitre for a camp type (3,5)
17/21 Glenda Slagg type's messy collection? (6)
19 Sawn-off shotguns initially going to each city (7)
21 See 17ac.
22 Tabloid's hell - no point getting protection from burning! (8)
24 Thumbs up Bush's arse – ten twiddles (6)
27 Bill tossed by quiet Daisy – a nice little earner (4,3)
28 Military type knocked back drink, like, before one-to-one (7)
30 He came before 11/12, showing extreme hardness (5)
31 Opera duo finally admitted to Glitter's corrupt circle (9)

DOWN

1 Conservative outburst by one who's pissed with it? (4)
2 Means of corporal punishment has our leftie Daves arse-over-tip (6)
3 Throw up hair-balls (8)
4 Corporation owner stuffing model in middle of heaving sofa (5)
5 Labour on the Lords? "Defunct institution!" (9)
6 Sense pathetic concealment of Condoleezza's debut bust-ups (6)
7 It's set to go up as Tim Rice's ultimate flop (4,4)
8 Blair not up to a year? (4)
13 As one back on the Tory front bench, Nick overturns lives (5)
15 Pissed but not lashing out (5)
16 How a drink problem is a crafty thing (9)
18 Dread being squeezed by a flipping Kray twin and his ilk (8)
20 Meeting of politicians gives you erection (8)
23 Cripes! Foreign article put off one trying to make a speech (6)
25 Goofs in print perpetrated by arsehole beset by age (6)
26 Very dodgy gins screw you digitally (1-4)
27 Chuck's group of luvvies (4)
29 This Lady Thatcher giving one to Reagan? (4)

Crossword 305 winner: JENNY GOLDNEY

ACROSS: 1 Backside 6 Beluga 9 Rip-off 10 Ensheath 11/22 Kick the shit out of 13 Nerdish 14 Slag off 16 Chopper 18 Scooper 20 Safe-blowing 24 Black rat 25 Paid-up 26 Ghetto 27 Fanlight.

DOWN: 2/23 A bit much 3 Knocked up 4 In focus 5 Erect 6 Boswell 7 Leech 8 Get stuffed 12 Methuselah 15 George III 17 Embargo 19 Crispin 21 Facet.

HUSBAND

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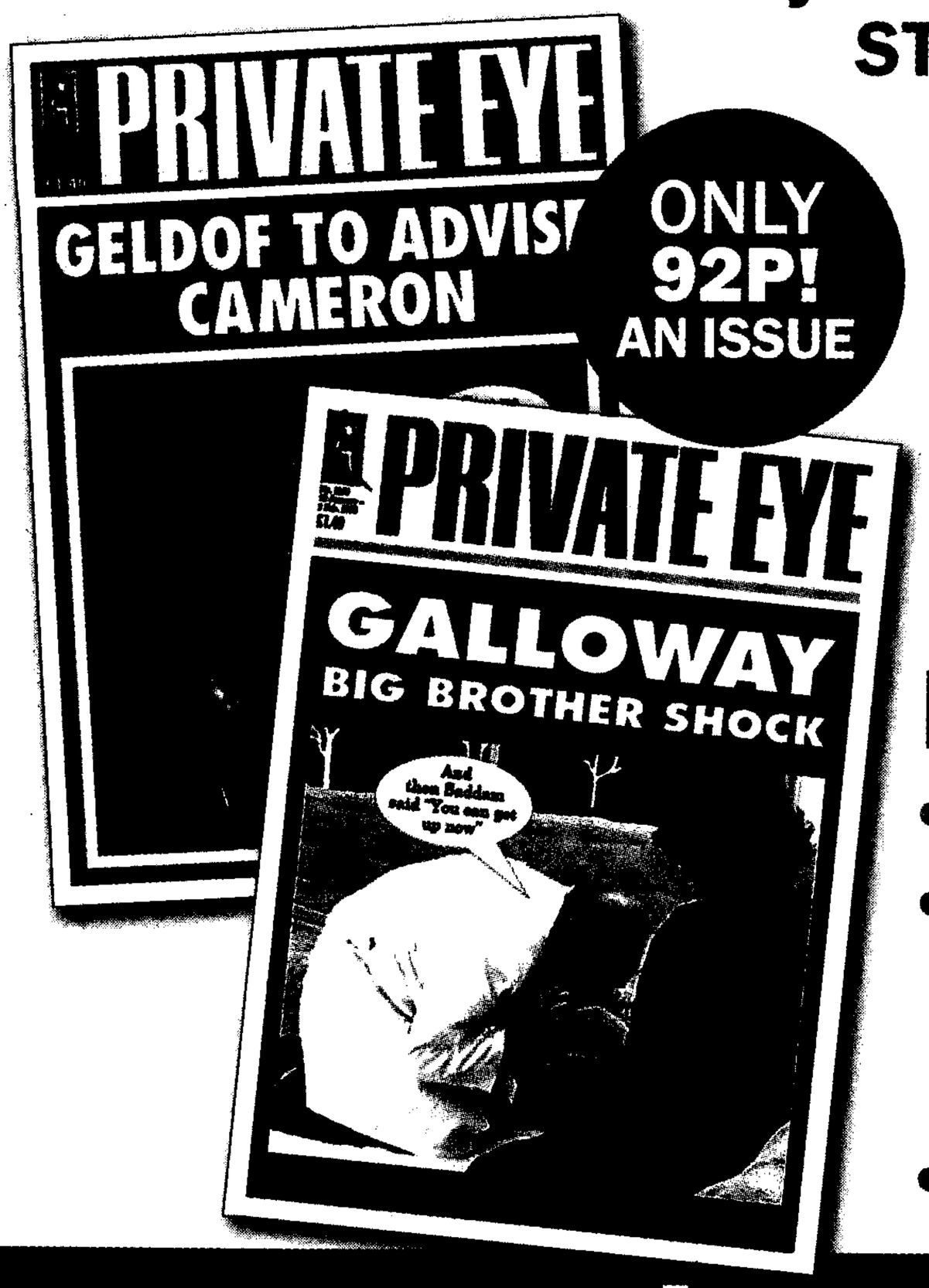

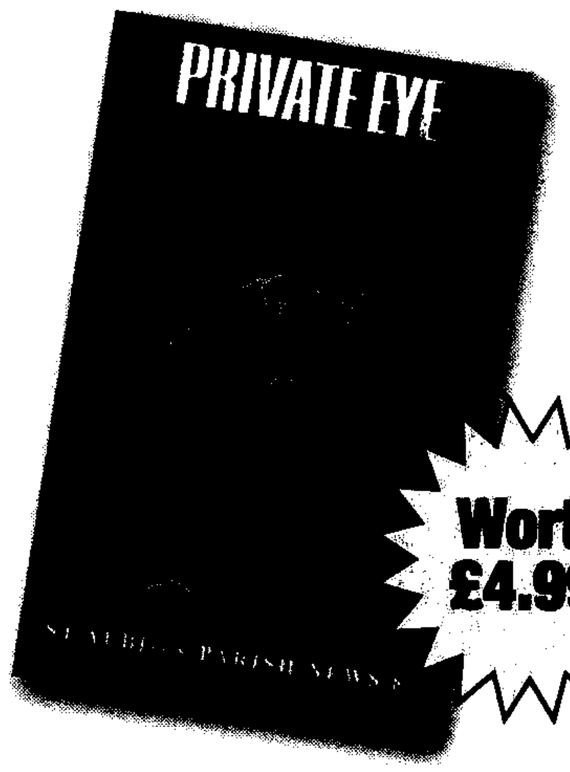

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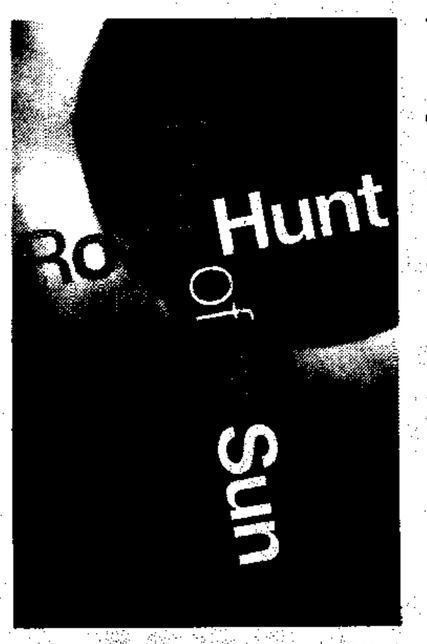

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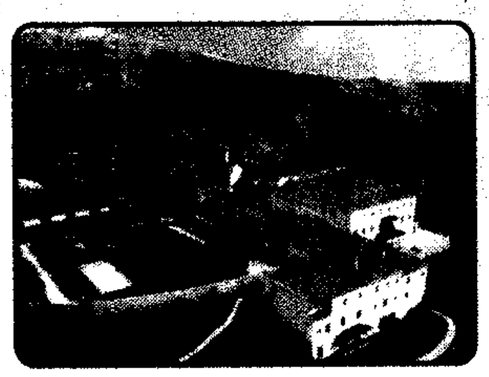

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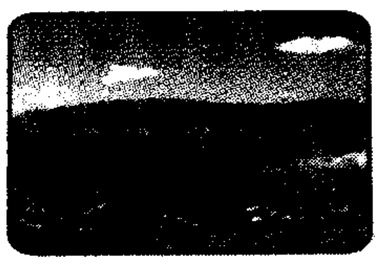

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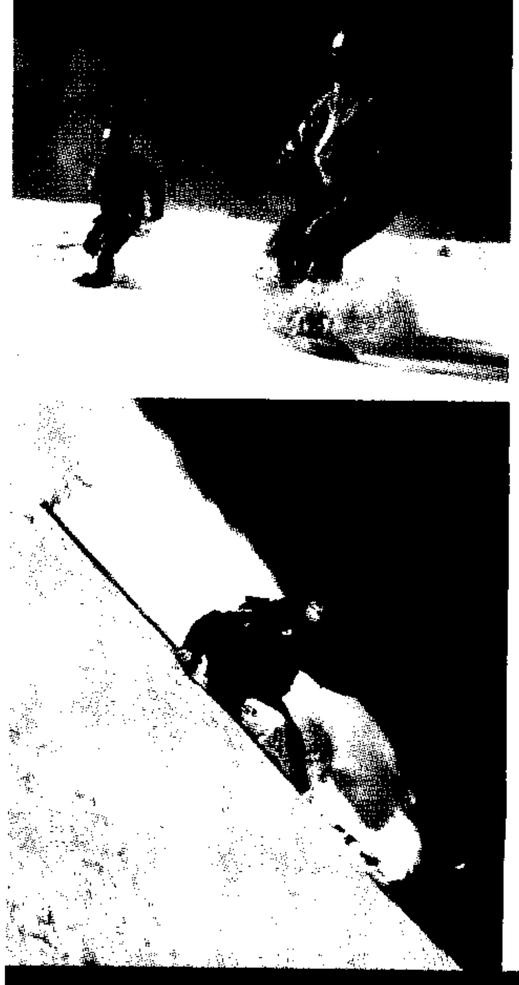

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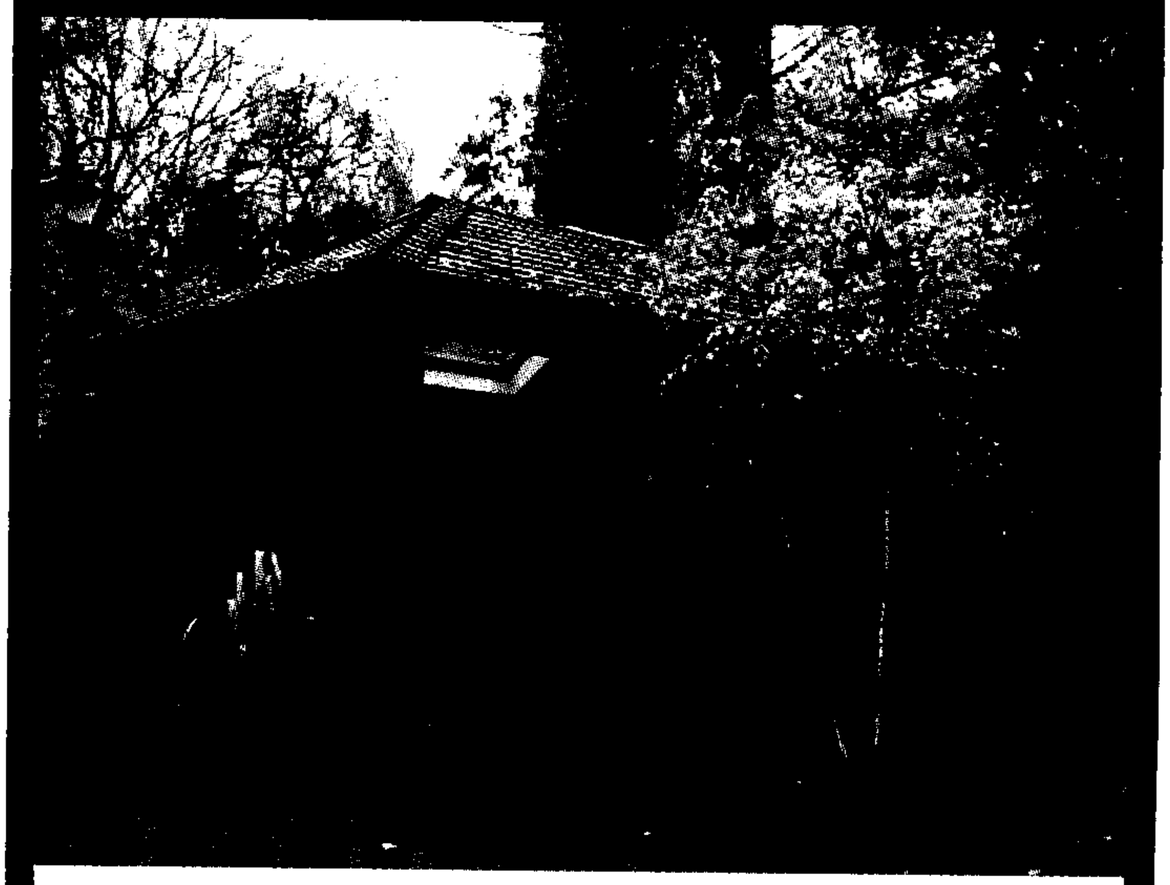

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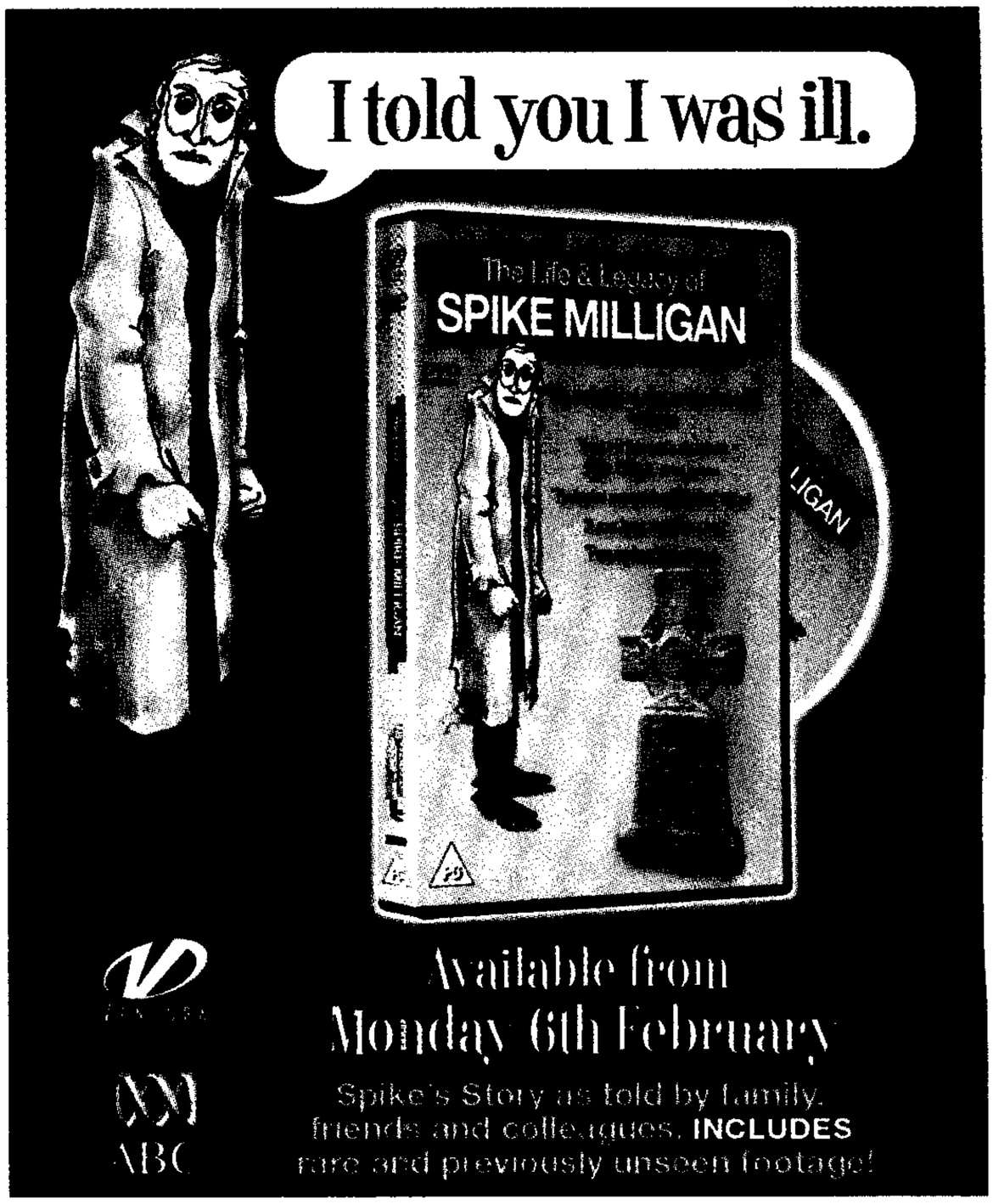
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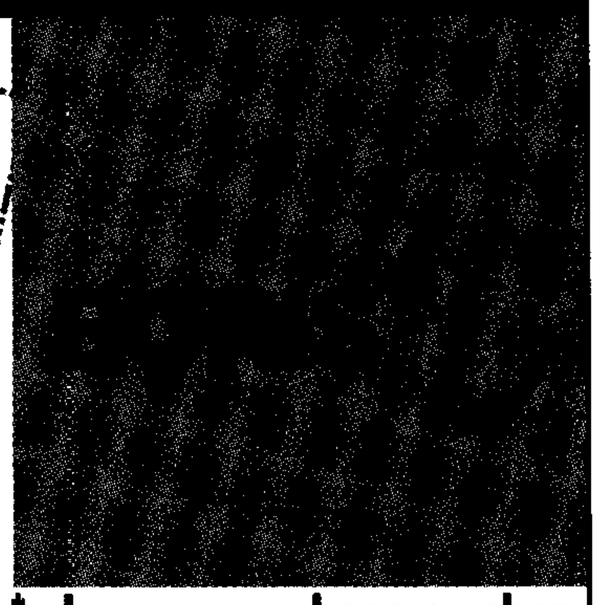

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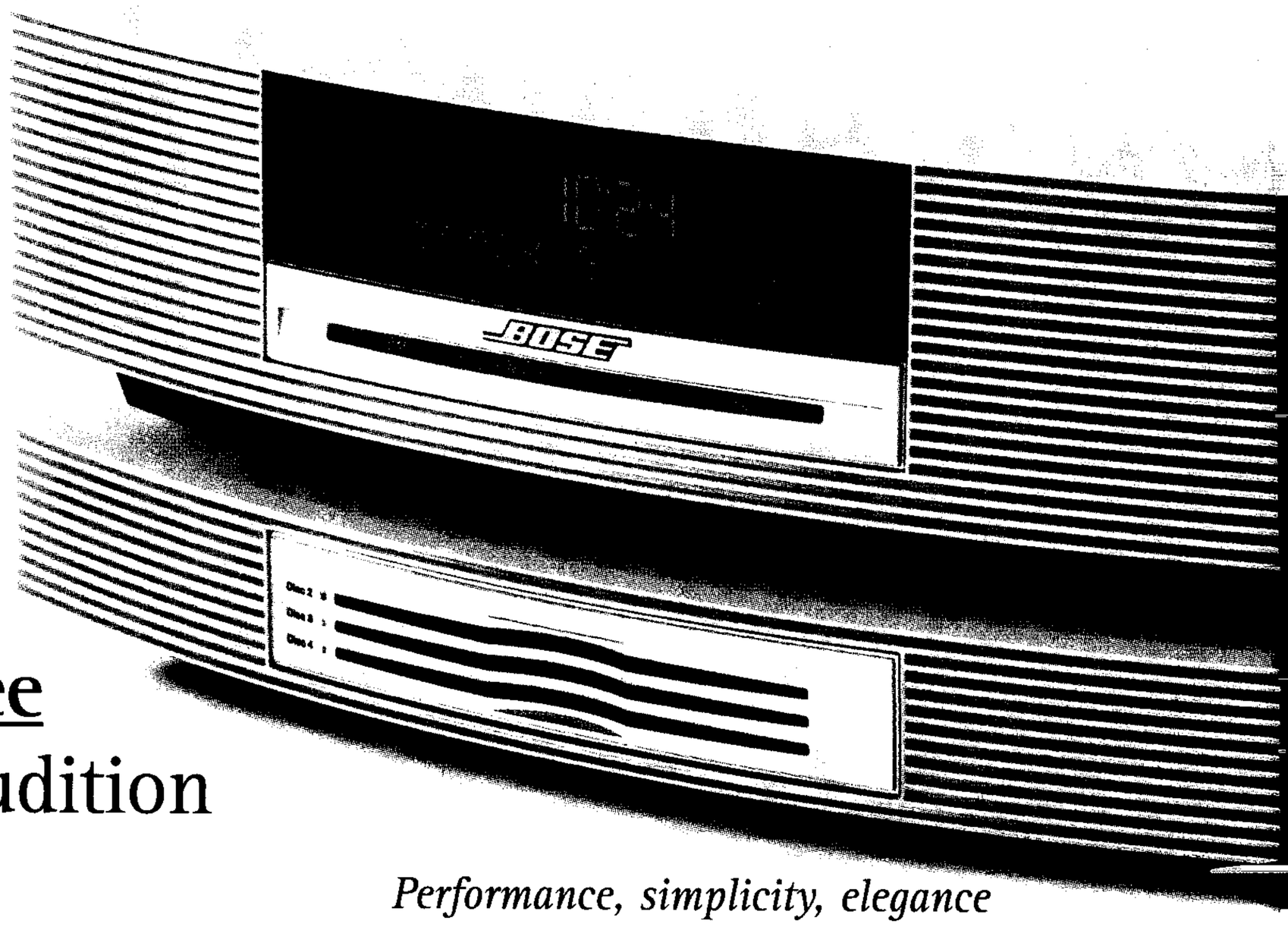

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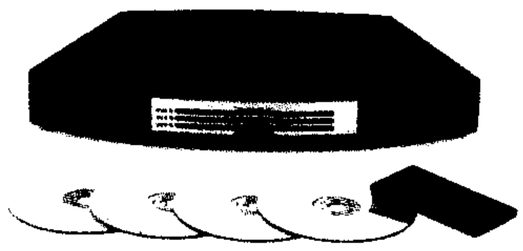

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BANKRUPTCY ASSOCIATION: Established 1983. Books and advice on bankruptcy: www.theba.org.uk

GOEDE VERWACHTING. 'Good Expectation'. Beautiful, traditional 1920's Dutch Sailing Barge needs refurbishing so a young couple, to be married in July can make it their first home. Any help to make her warm, dry and cosy, immensely appreciated. Tel: 07710 720 954.

ZORON: SPACE ODYSSEY 2050. 397-page novel, 1st ed. Stellar intrigue, new technology. dcs@amserve.com for details.

CHOOSE THE NEWS and express your views at www.punchycomment.com

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OLD PERSIAN RUGS – mostly £100-£3000. Shed not shop – telephone first. DESMOND NORTH, East Peckham, Kent. Telephone: 01622 871 353.

DRIVE PUSSY WILD! Purrfect gift ideas. www.sparkipuss.com... for cat lovers.

RURAL 6-ROOM POOLVILLA: Costa Tropical, Andalucia (£315,000) and 4-room poolapartment (£126,000). www.andalucia-natural.com/in.htm Tel: 0034 699 061 842.

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THE GIFT that says Thank You forever: a Sainthood from www.yousaint.com

EYES 796 TO DATE: 355 issues. Offers? Tel: 01753 525 249.

SAUCY GIFTS for Valentines Day? See WWW.NAFFTOYS.CO.UK

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PREP SCHOOL QUESTIONS? Talk about your school – talk, ask, buy, sell! www.prep-talk.org

"JUST ONE DROP can cause a major wave." Join survivors making waves by signing this petition KILL BILL vol. 2 The Draft Mental Health Bill www.petitionthem.com/?sect=detail&pet=2183

MI5 tried to kill me on 17 November 2001 – www.mi5.com

[redacted]

YOUNG GENT struggling with debt. Much gratitude for anything. S/C: 16-30-10; A/C: 10004640 or call 07966 790 798.

DEPRESSION after a relative passing away left me without ability to function for a long time. Need help to pay debts accumulated. S/C: 56-00-06. A/C: 21545774.

in debt?need help?
Repossession? Mortgage arrears?
Bankruptcy? Failing Business?
in an I.V.A. or other arrangement?
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PHILANTHOPIST(S) / ANGEL(S) sought for immediate loan(s) to prevent bankruptcy for £100K debt. Partial long-term security. Banks not understanding. Nationwide, S/C: 07-01-16. A/C: 14071516. Please help! Reply with offers to Box 153523.

RETINAL PIGMENTOSA. This means I'm slowly losing my vision, Doctors say I have 12/36 months' left. I have worked hard all my life but at 41 and alone I am dreading this and I am in dire need of your help. I want to leave the City and move to the countryside to re-train myself to life without sight, but I can't do it without you, any donation thankfully received, I will attend any hospital in the UK to confirm this. Basically I'm looking for a miracle. Reply Box 154831.

YOUNG SONGWRITER needs help to fulfil dream after car crash forced career change. Lloyds TSB, S/C: 77-50-10. A/C: 38020260.

I'M 21 and supporting my family after my dad's death. Business slow at the moment and I risk losing everything. Thanks. S/C: 20-45-77. A/C: 20049921.

SEND US PACKING! Your opportunity to avert a revolution: liberal agitators willing to accept quiet life abroad in return for cash. Buy our silence. S/C: 089288. A/C: 83040731. paypal malcontents@a-loose-end.com

PENNILESS development graduate needs research sponsorship for Rwanda rape victims. NatWest, S/C: 53-70-44. A/C: 16718623. Call 07906 626 555.

HELP. £30.70 required to finance my daily *Guardian* habit, thanks to cost increase. NatWest, S/C: 54-30-03. A/C: 68164505.

INHERITANCE STOLEN by wicked step-mother. Need £5000 to make my home (boat) seaworthy. S/C: 77-66-49. A/C: 08586960.

AUTISTIC SON – needs specialist help. Parents desperate. PLEASE HELP. NatWest, S/C: 01-01-42. A/C: 17036658.

BRITISH SQUASH professional requires help to reach full potential as elite sportsman. squashaid@hotmail.com

LOST: MP who answers to the name of George, balding has been nicknamed gorgeous, last seen with his Bigger Brother in Borehamwood.

DETERMINED TO CONTINUE. Struggling artist with three kids needs support. S/C: 30-98-85. A/C: 11517860.

WOULD-BE PUBLISHER desperate to continue important south-east Asian health magazine. Ridiculously grateful for help. Nationwide, S/C: 07-01-16. A/C: 46176824.

INVESTOR WITH 30K needed for house purchase; formal legal agreement. Info: email house_cf@yahoo.co.uk

PENSIONER must fill £3k black hole following self-publishing disaster. Help appreciated. NatWest, S/C: 60-21-49. A/C: 32009941.

PERFORMING ARTS CHARITY (SCO # 27701SCO) needs money for building renovation. See www.teepooka.org for details. S/C: 83-20-03. A/C: 00232428.

DISABLED WOMAN, huge debts. Need people to visit websites! Please mail. edit4me@btinternet.com

TALENTED, ESTABLISHED, CLASSICAL MUSICIAN: Principal player in one of London's major orchestras seeks help to buy and play exquisite Lorenzini viola c.1780, priced 60K. Lacking funds due to single parent status. This viola and I belong together. Please, please help, any donation hugely appreciated. Acknowledgements / engagements undertaken for no fee / long-term repayment if requested. Reply Box 154854.

AM I TOO OLD? Is it too late? Missed the starting gun and need to make 50k fast. Gainful employment required by articulate, bright, wasted 44-year-old male. Absolutely anything considered. Reply Box 154877 or donations to S/C: 60-12-36. A/C: 26132672.

[redacted]

DEBTS RECOVERED / PEOPLE FOUND: No trace, no fee; Former police detective, LLB (Hons). www.britrisk.net Phone 0870 888 8001.

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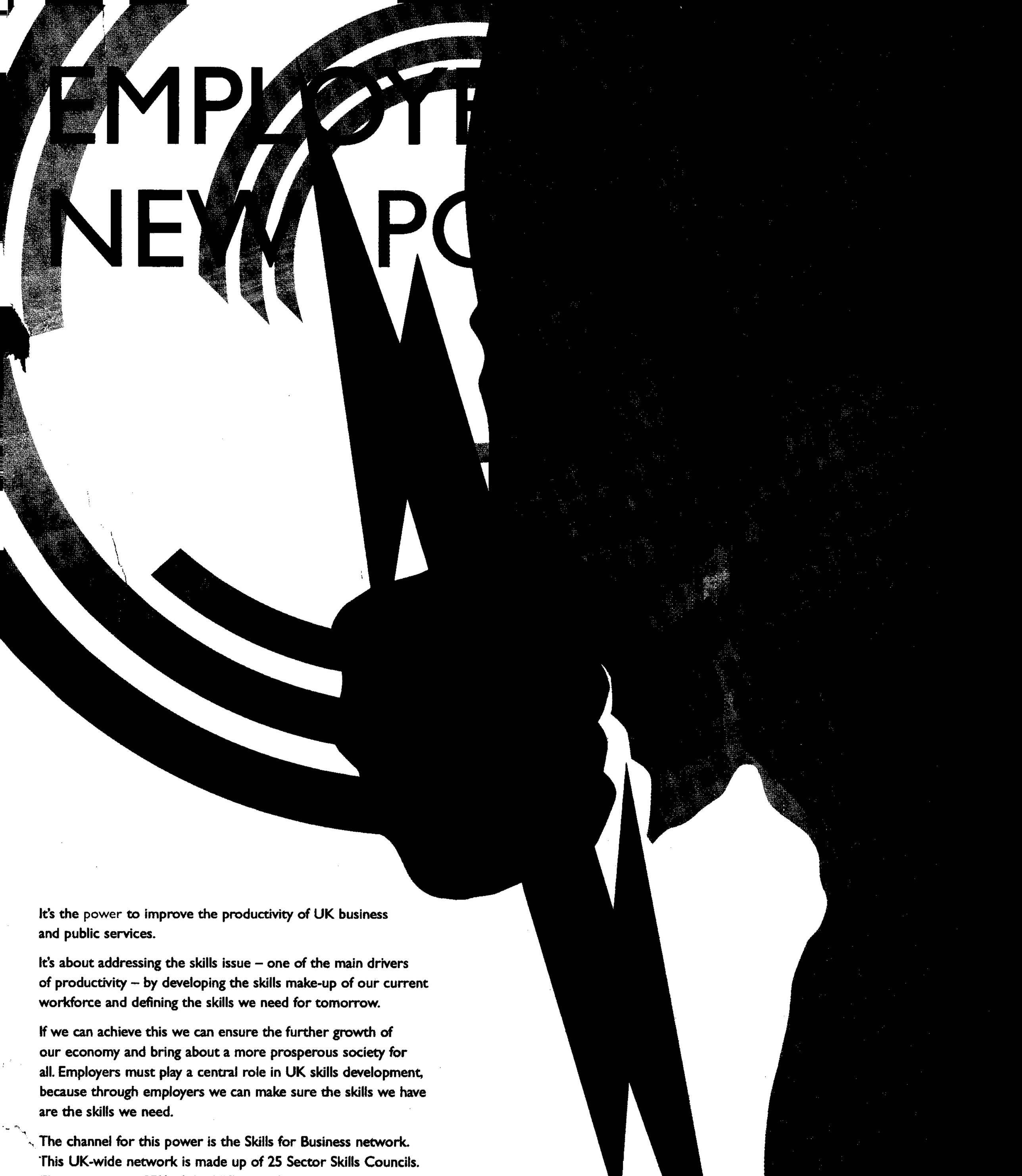

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